

# READER

## Music is for every body

Chicago's concert venues have made welcome advances in accessibility, but a regulatory gray area lets them fall short of what they should be.

By BRIAN O'DONNELL 24



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## THIS WEEK ON CHICAGOREADER.COM



## So you want a new president?

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## A Dusty Groove doc premieres in Chicago

Danielle Beverly's Dusty Groove: The Sound of Transition tells intimate stories about our deep connection to music.



## High Fidelity is poised to be an all-time top five

The TV reboot remixes all the best parts of the movie into something even better.



## TRANSPORTATION

# Don't be a livable streets jerk

Thoughtful transportation advocacy requires intersectionality.

By JOHN GREENFIELD

**T**raffic safety and sustainable transportation boosters like myself like to believe we're on the right side of history. I'm confident that in the future more people will get behind our efforts to reduce driving and crashes, and create better conditions for walking, biking, transit, and public space.

On the other hand, urban planning and livable streets advocacy have historically been dominated by relatively privileged folks, who are typically white, male, middle class or affluent, well-educated, aren't living with a disability, etc. As such, there have been plenty of examples of livable streets advocates having blind spots when it comes to issues impacting marginalized communities.

This has sometimes resulted in policies and projects with unintended consequences, or transportation advocacy that actually does harm. So I wanted to take a look at ways that advocates can be better allies to social justice efforts, and avoid acting like what I call a livable streets jerk.

I was partly inspired by a New York City colleague's recent tweet complaining about unlicensed entrepreneurs on the Brooklyn Bridge blocking bike and foot traffic. They posted a photo of a Black coffee vendor and tagged the NYPD. After many people pointed out that the post put the guy in danger of a potentially violent encounter with the police, the colleague,

to their credit, acknowledged on Twitter that they'd made an error.

In fairness, I've made my share of mistakes in covering sustainable transportation issues over the years. The most important rule I've learned is to always ask myself what the potential impacts of projects and policies may be on people from various marginalized groups.

I'm talking about questions like, if we ramp up traffic policing in lower-income communities with high levels of traffic violence as part of Vision Zero—the effort to eliminate serious and fatal crashes—will that result in more racial profiling and police abuse of Black and Brown residents?

Similarly, if Chicago responds to the recent wave of violent robberies on the el by deploying more police officers in the system, how do we make sure that results in a net increase in safety and comfort for all riders?

If we extend a rapid transit line, build a nifty new walking and biking path, or make it easier to build dense, low-parking transit-oriented development (all good things in a vacuum), will that jack up property values, property taxes, and rents, a phenomenon known as “environmental gentrification”? If so, how can we preserve housing affordability and prevent the displacement of longtime poor and blue-collar residents?

Is it ever acceptable for a transit agency to

The MiCA transit-oriented development near the California Blue Line station JOHN GREENFIELD

do a major facelift of a rapid transit station without making it wheelchair accessible?

Would increasing taxes on private Uber and Lyft rides to fight traffic congestion, as Chicago recently did, reduce the income of working-class and immigrant ride-hail drivers, or make it more expensive for women, trans people, and other at-risk individuals to feel safe while traveling home at night? If so, how can we mitigate these things?

You get the idea. If you're a livable streets advocate, my advice is to try to avoid having blinders on about possible unintended consequences, even if they wouldn't directly affect you. The historic failures of privileged decision-makers to see this stuff is a big reason why it's important to have all demographics represented in planning and advocacy, as well as the community input process.

Chicago leaders who fight for racial and economic justice on a daily basis shared some more thoughts on the subject. Former mayoral candidate and Austin Chamber of Commerce director Amara Enyia, who helped collect input for Vision Zero in west-side neighborhoods, notes that the potential for increased police abuse was largely off the radar of transportation officials and mainstream advocates. “Nobody thought about the implications for communities that are already struggling with over-policing.”

Enyia credits Oboi Reed, who leads the mobility justice nonprofit Equiticity, with being a “crucial voice” for bringing that issue to the forefront by convincing the Active Transportation Alliance to cancel a planned Vision Zero summit with a \$50 entry fee and an all-white speaker lineup.

“It's important to avoid a narrow view of what safety is,” Enyia adds. She notes that while transportation advocates often focus on protecting people from dangerous drivers, mobility barriers like street crime and unfair enforcement, such as the CPD's practice of heavy bike ticketing in Black and Brown communities as an excuse for searches, are often overlooked.

“I understand that people are passionate about protected bike lanes and transit-oriented development,” Enyia says. “But it's important to think about how these things fit into the existing community and do culturally and contextually relevant outreach. That's how you get buy-in and support instead of suspicion and pushback.”

Christian Diaz is co-chair of Elevated Chicago, which advocates for equitable transit-oriented development (TOD), and is lead housing organizer for the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, which fights displacement. In that swiftly gentrifying northwest side community, green projects like the 606 elevated trail, and the many dense, high-end developments that have sprung up near Blue Line stations since the City Council passed ordinances facilitating TOD, have fueled housing speculation.

A study released last month by DePaul University's Institute for Housing Studies found that home prices along the western half of the 606 have risen by nearly 344 percent since 2012. And last week the developer of Logan's Crossing, an upscale TOD that replaced the Discount Megamall, an indoor flea market that featured largely Latino vendors, announced that studio apartments will rent for a whopping \$1,895 a month.

“We can't just tack on sustainable transportation amenities to the racist monster that is gentrification and development in Chicago, in a neighborhood like Logan Square that has been historically redlined,” Diaz says. “We have to be mindful of how our work relates to that history. If only some neighborhoods get amenities like the 606 and nice housing near transit, there's going to be competition for space, and demographics that have been historically propped up by government policies will have an advantage. Then we're just reinforcing racial injustice.”

“We need our friends in sustainability advocacy to ask themselves who projects are for, and how we can make sure the benefits go to everyone, including the people who need them the most, not just rich white people,” Diaz says. He credits Active Trans with being “a great partner to LSNA” in recent years by building support for a 100-percent affordable TOD next to the Logan Square Blue station, and helping to pass an ordinance last month freezing development along the west end of the 606 for six months so that the city can come up with an anti-displacement strategy.

Diaz has one more piece of advice for livable streets fans who want to be allies, not obstacles, to social justice in Black and Brown communities. “Listen. Don't just come into our neighborhoods and tell us what we need. Hear our concerns. We bring as much to the table as transportation advocates, because I do think we're on the same team.”

@greenfieldjohn



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## NEWS & POLITICS



### POLITICS

## Who's next—Burke? Madigan?

A few reasons why Trump released Blago from prison.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

**I**t's not often that I praise Donald Trump, but recent circumstances force me to do just that, so . . .

Bravo, Mr. President—your release of former Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich from federal prison is one of the most spectacularly brazen acts of shameless chutzpah I've ever seen.

And I've seen lots of shamelessness, having covered Chicago politicians for almost 40 years.

Not that Blago deserved to spend more time in prison. He'd already served eight years on a 14-year sentence—enough's enough already.

But don't kid yourself into thinking Trump released Blago out of compassion for the Blagojevich family. C'mon, people, you're too smart for that. As we all know, compassion is

not a Trump thing.

No, let's run down a few of the real reasons Trump commuted Blago's sentence.

One: Trump wanted to send a big fuck you to the federal prosecutors who are going after Michael Flynn, Roger Stone, and other miscreants in the presidential universe. These prosecutors are not literally one in the same, of course—but they're cut from the same cloth: Dudley Do-Rights who, after a stint with the feds, go to work for corporate firms, where they get rich defending the same sorts of scoundrels they once prosecuted.

Speaking of shameless cynicism.

Two: it sets a precedent for the liberation of Stone and Flynn, et al. Sort of like a trial balloon—free Blago and see how it plays. And so far, it's playing very well with the Trump



## NEWS & POLITICS

Pre-conviction Blago, approaching sister-in-law Deborah Mell, at an event celebrating passage of the state's LGBTQ rights law  TRACY BAJM

base. As for those Republicans who might be enraged? They're too chicken to raise a fuss—but I'll get to the *Tribsters* in a bit.

Three: Trump wants to legalize extortion—at least the extortion he apparently commits all the time.

Clearly, Trump doesn't view what Blago did as a crime. Blago was found guilty of trying to strong-arm people into donating to his campaign.

It's all very transactional—and Trump loves transactions. Blago had something of value—in one case, Obama's senate vacancy—and he wanted to swap it for something of equal value. What, Trump may ask, is wrong with that?

Trump was up to the same thing when he got busted for trying to swap about \$400 million in military aid to Ukraine for an announcement that Ukraine was investigating Joe Biden on corruption charges.

Four: Trump plans to put Blago to use in his reelection campaign. And here I'd like to pause from my list-making to voice my appreciation at the seamlessness with which Blago burst forth from prison.

I mean, the guy's as fit as a fiddle. You'd have thought he spent the last eight years at a Canyon Ranch as opposed to federal prison. He reminds me of Steve McQueen's character in *The Great Escape*—no matter how many times the Nazis throw him into the cooler, he comes out looking fresh as a daisy. Doesn't even have to shave.

More to the point, from the moment Trump let him loose, Blago's been a one-man Trump commercial, praising the president for leading the charge for "criminal justice."

You can expect to hear Blago singing this song until November. Anything to convince voters—especially Black voters—that a vote for Trump is somehow a vote for justice.

At the same time, Trump and his justice department are resisting efforts by Mayor Lightfoot to set standards for police interaction with the public, especially young Black men.

Moreover, Trump and his local acolytes are waging war against Cook County state's attorney Kim Foxx, who they think is soft on crime.

So, Trump will try to pick up a few Black votes (he only needs a few) for "reforming"

criminal justice, while satisfying his white base with endless talk about Jussie Smollett and Kim Foxx and throwing more Black people in jail.

Doesn't get more cynical than that.

Well, all is not lost. At least I can watch Trump emasculate the Republican establishment in Illinois—the editorial writers at the *Chicago Tribune* included.

For years, Blago has been their poster child for all that's corrupt with Democratic politics. And now Trump releases Blago from prison.

It's funny to watch them struggle with this. They foam with rage at Blago. But they barely mention the man who sprung him.

To read a *Tribune* editorial or a John Kass column on this subject, you'd think Trump played no role in releasing Blago. As though Blago sprung himself from prison.

A similar thing happened in the 2018 governor's race, when the *Tribune* ran front-page stories about the tapes in which Blago chatted with J.B. Pritzker.

Governor Bruce Rauner and his allies were set to endlessly use those tapes to link one with the other—like putting Blago's head on Pritzker's body.

But then, Trump sort of turned Blago into a folk hero with the MAGA-hat crowd by talking about commuting his sentence. And just like that, the Blago-Pritzker tapes were virtually worthless.

It's like all the other crimes of Trump—from intimidating witnesses to allegations of rape. The Republican establishment has to pretend they don't exist. If they complain, the president will turn the base against them with one presidential tweet.

Hey, Mr. President, if you're looking for other ways to intimidate Illinois Republicans, why stop with Blago? Chicago has no shortage of big-time Democrats either indicted or under investigation by the same sorts of federal prosecutors you despise.

That would include Alderman Ed Burke, your former property tax lawyer, and House speaker Michael Madigan.

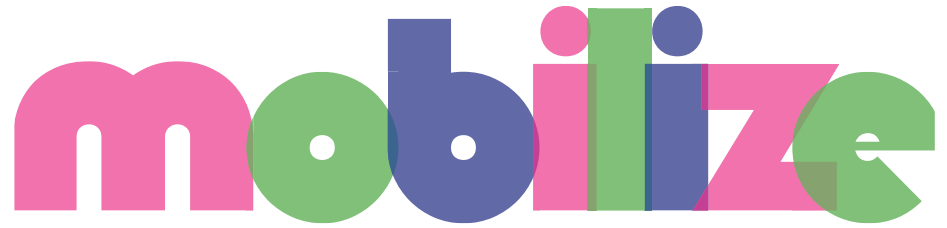
Make corruption officially legal, Mr. President—pardon them all!

Can you imagine Blago, Burke, and maybe even Speaker Madigan, in MAGA hats on stage at a Trump rally?

Man, I'd love to see the *Tribsters* try to write their way around that. 

 @joravben

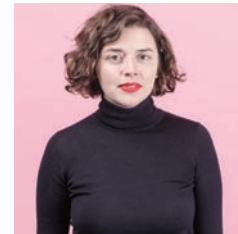
# READER



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\*Dukmasova will just co-host the March 3 event.



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## NEWS

# Pangea still reigns

As the mayor spotlights the city's eviction problems, 2019 court data shows little is changing.

By MAYA DUKMASOVA

More than 17,000 Chicago renters wound up in eviction court last year according to 2019 court data obtained by the *Reader* from the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County. The number of cases filed remains on par with city eviction filings since 2016, though the data provided by the clerk excludes sealed eviction cases. Pangea Real Estate remains Chicago's most prolific filer of eviction cases, as the company has been since 2012.

According to the data, Pangea filed 1,264 cases in Chicago's eviction courtrooms in 2019. Of those, 1,083 were against Chicago tenants and an additional 181 cases were filed in Chicago's courtrooms against tenants in their suburban properties. These cases represent a slight dip compared to the company's filings against city renters in 2018, but Pangea still filed three times as many cases as the next most frequent filer, a third-party property management company called WPD Management.

A two-year investigation published by the *Reader* last year found that Pangea became Chicago's most prolific evictor in the wake of the 2008 foreclosure crisis. Since it began operating in 2009, it has filed more cases than

the next four landlords combined, at times accounting for as much as 20 percent of all eviction cases filed in the south and west side zip codes where its holdings are concentrated. The company's founders, who'd made a fortune in payday lending before the financial crisis, took advantage of the avalanche of foreclosures to cheaply acquire apartment buildings by the block in neighborhoods like South Shore, Chatham, and South Austin. Over the years, Pangea's real estate empire has grown to more than 7,500 units in Chicago, plus thousands more in suburban apartment complexes and in Indianapolis and Baltimore. Recently Pangea moved to acquire hundreds more distressed apartment units in Chicago that were operated by disgraced (and now bankrupt) nonprofit Better Housing Foundation.

While for years Pangea was filing the most cases in the 60649 zip code—South Shore—last year's data shows its evictions are now most densely concentrated in the 60644 zip code, which covers the South Austin neighborhood on the west side.

In response to a request for comment, Pangea's CEO Pete Martay wrote in an e-mail that as the "largest owner of privately funded market rate apartments in Chicago... it is un-



## NEWS & POLITICS

A Pangea apartment building at 5018 W. Jackson in the 60644 zip code, where Pangea is now filing the most evictions against its tenants.

TRAVIS ROOZÉE

fortunately unavoidable that our total eviction filings are higher than all of the other large operators.” Martay underscored Pangea’s singularity in providing unsubsidized housing in working-class neighborhoods, though about 20 percent of the company’s units are rented to tenants with Section 8 vouchers.

“We are devoted to working with our residents who have fallen behind on rent, well before it becomes necessary to consider filing a court case for non-payment of rent,” Martay continued. “Even after an eviction is filed we continue to work with our residents, within the confines of the court system. . . . Pangea’s goal is not, nor has it ever been, for our residents to be physically evicted by the Sheriff, nor to damage our residents’ ability to obtain housing in the future.”

The *Reader*’s investigation found that Pangea has developed an aggressive and formulaic approach to eviction cases, offering “pay-and-stay” deals to many of the tenants it takes to court. While these deals mean avoiding an immediate eviction for tenants, the *Reader* found that ultimately Pangea’s eviction rate reflected the city’s as a whole, with more than 60 percent of tenants winding up with a judgment against them. The pay-and-stay deals, negotiated by Pangea’s lawyers with tenants who rarely have their own attorneys, lock renters into a contract to pay monthly rent as well as regular payments toward their debt.

However, by signing the deals, tenants agree to give up their right to a trial; by the time they fall behind on these payments (as they often do), they’ve already agreed to be evicted and no longer have an opportunity to present any grievances about their landlord or the fairness of the deal to a judge.

As has been typical of the company’s response to questions about its evictions, Martay emphasized Pangea’s track record of investing “more than \$350 million of private capital in the past 10 years in [Chicago] with a majority of those dollars directly overlapping with Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s new Invest South/West Initiative and its 10 target zones.”

Lightfoot spotlighted evictions in her February 14 City Club address, while making sweeping promises to “end poverty in Chicago in a generation.” She promised to push a “tenant protection package designed to help residents by giving them a fair chance to stay in their home. . . . The first part of this package will include an ordinance establishing just cause for eviction.” As she elaborated on what that would mean, Lightfoot said that “based on a recent study of data from 2010 to 2017 approximately 25 percent of all evictions are no-fault, meaning the tenant did nothing wrong but had to move anyway. These no-fault evictions can give tenants as little as 30 days notice to move. . . . Our new ordinance will extend the notice period for no-cause evictions.” Lightfoot didn’t say how much longer the notice period would be.

No-cause evictions often take place in gentrifying neighborhoods, when developers and

## POETRY CORNER

### Donny & Minnie on the 66 Bus

By Tara Betts

Some of the best things in Chicago seem almost mythic in existence. The Water Tower surviving cow & flame, the steely limbs of Picasso’s sculpture allowing humans to sit at its feet, the blues clubs still stuffed with juke, smoke, slow grind & knife fight, even Donny Hathaway & Minnie Riperton’s voices on rainy days ring in headphones, pulsing stars from happier nights. You are on the 66 bus again, east from K-town—Karlo, Kedvale, Keeler, Keystone, Kilbourn, Kildare, Kolmar, Kostner, Kilpatrick, avenues with reputations fit to kill, but still all history.

You think of George’s Music Room, how the owner once touched the throat that sung “Loving You”, the throat clenched by deadly cells that possessed the flesh of Minnie’s notes. You think of applejack hats, how Donny’s voice kept telling you we’ll all be free, your anthem so you and your brothers could shake-a-hand-shake-a-hand every Christmas, and this Christmas too. As the buildings outside the bus windows blur from speed, drops & fog steaming the windows. You wonder if the ghetto made Donny try flying more than depression swelling into that fatal leap.

When you count the breaths to your stop, wondering why you love the route & find yourself silently pleading to stay. You lean deep into your seat, press repeat since nostalgia becomes a contradiction of armor & comfort.

*Tara Betts is the author of Break the Habit and Arc & Hue, a co-editor of The Beiging of America: Personal Narratives about Being Mixed Race in the 21st Century, and editor of the critical edition of Philippa Duke Schuyler’s memoir Adventures in Black and White. She teaches at the Stonecoast MFA program at University of Southern Maine.*

*A biweekly series curated by the Chicago Reader and sponsored by the Poetry Foundation. This week’s poem is curated by poet Yvonne Zipter.*

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## NEWS & POLITICS

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landlords serve 30-day notices to existing tenants in order to rehab buildings and rent out units at higher prices. “Just cause” eviction laws as they exist elsewhere in the country aren’t just designed to give people more time to move if they’re being evicted simply because the landlord wants them gone. These laws typically make it so that landlords cannot evict tenants unless they have a good reason, such as nonpayment of rent, chronically late rent, lease violations, etc. The *Reader* asked the mayor’s office to elaborate whether Lightfoot’s proposal would actually establish protections against no-cause evictions or only focus on extending the time people had to move.

In an e-mailed statement, the mayor’s office reiterated support for the idea of making landlords give far more advance notice to tenants they’re evicting without cause, but didn’t say Lightfoot would be pushing for a law prohibiting landlords from evicting without cause. “Mayor Lightfoot knows that housing instability and evictions play a significant

role in the cycle of poverty impacting so many individuals in our city, particularly in communities of color,” wrote deputy press secretary Eugenia Orr. “To ensure that more residents have stable, affordable housing, the administration is working collaboratively with members of the City Council to bring forward a series of reforms that will allow people—including [formerly incarcerated] residents who are systematically excluded from securing housing—to get an apartment, and have a real chance to stay in their homes so they can provide shelter to their families, keep a job, and contribute to our economy. The administration wants to find pragmatic solutions to address the needs of these residents at risk of falling into a cycle of poverty because of housing instability and discrimination and improve the city of life for every community.”

Read Maya Dukmasova’s May 2019 cover story “Pangea has taken thousands to eviction court. The story of an apartment empire.”

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& SENSE

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Duro Olowu, Spring/Summer 2020, Look 7  
CHRISTINA EBENEZE

## VISUAL ARTS

# The mix master

Nigerian-born, London-based fashion designer Duro Olowu curates one of the MCA's largest shows ever filled with local treasures.

By ISA GIALLORENZO

Museums can often feel like a cold, overly formal place. On one hand, that setting promotes an aura of respect around the artwork; on the other, it can lengthen the distance between the art and its viewer. “Duro Olowu: Seeing Chicago” is an antidote to that.

“You’re going to see color, and patterns, and texture—not just in the art but in the way things are presented on the pedestals and on the walls,” says Naomi Beckwith, senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, which organized the exhibition, one

where this came from.’ And it’s been that way ever since. He has a taste level beyond anyone I’ve ever known.”

Olowu grew up going back and forth between Lagos, Nigeria, and London. His father was Nigerian and his mother was Jamaican. The fourth of six siblings, he was raised in a large family that encouraged his artistic endeavors. Fashion has been a lifelong interest; his parents always valued the art of dressing well. His mother taught him early on how to compose a look, mixing high fashion and local West African fabrics. Once it was time to go to college, Olowu followed his father’s footsteps and studied to be a lawyer at the University of Canterbury in England in the 80s. He practiced law but began designing his own clothing and then launched his eponymous brand. He hit the jackpot when *Vogue* editor Sally Singer loved a dress he designed. Dubbed “The Duro dress,” it is fashioned in Olowu’s signature mix of vibrant prints and features a V-neck, empire waist, and wide sleeves, slightly evocative of a kimono. That dress led to him being named the Best New Designer at the British Fashion Awards in 2005. Since then he’s put together two critically acclaimed pop- up shops/art shows at Salon 94 gallery in New York and a blockbuster exhibit at the London Camden Arts Center in 2016 entitled “Making & Unmaking.”

Famous for creating unexpected yet harmonious combinations of vivid prints, Olowu also takes his tailoring seriously. According to Goldman, what makes his garments special is “a lightness in fabrics and extraordinary taste in color and print mix.” “He comes from a very authentic place and it translates in his collections,” Goldman says. “There is no one I know who makes clothes that are as flattering as Duro does. It all seems to fit beautifully on a body. Clearly [my clients] love him and they treasure his pieces—they come in just to get his things. He’s a treasure.”

The admiration, Olowu says, is mutual. “The manner in which the wonderful women of Chicago have supported my career in fashion and wear my womenswear collections which are

**“DURO OLOWU: SEEING CHICAGO”**  
2/29-5/10, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 220 E. Chicago, [mcachicago.org](http://mcachicago.org), \$15, \$8 students and seniors, free kids 12 and under and members of the military, free for Illinois residents on Tuesdays.

of the largest show ever put on at the MCA. Beckwith didn’t curate it, though; that role was undertaken by Duro Olowu, a Nigerian-born, London-based fashion designer. His namesake boutique in London was a harbinger of things to come—a mishmash of his own designs and a collection of pieces that appeal to his taste. The shop displays traditional and cutting-edge artworks alongside vinyl albums, books, tapestries, and decor objects. Anything goes, as long as he likes them. “He’s interested in flattening these distinctions that we may put up around art,” Beckwith says. “Like, what is fine art, and what is found art, what is inspired versus what is academic.”

“It’s like walking into the coolest museum shop with handpicked items that have been curated so perfectly by the master of all masters,” says Ikram Goldman, owner of the Ikram boutique in the Gold Coast and the person who first brought Olowu’s designs to Chicago. She met Olowu through a mutual friend in the early 2000s before he launched his label in 2004. Olowu presented his collection to Goldman in a hotel she was staying at in New York. “I remember thinking, ‘OK, I know he’s showing me these, but I know there’s a lot more magic



sold there is really inspiring,” he says. “Like the city’s museums and private collectors, these women are enthusiastic, curious, and keen to explore new ideas in their original form. They also love quality over trend, something that is a wonderful and unique trait.” One of those women was Michelle Obama, who first discovered Olowu’s designs while her husband was running for president. She subsequently sported many of Olowu’s garments in official engagements and even got him to decorate a room in the White House for Christmas in 2015.

Now Chicagoans will have the opportunity to savor Olowu’s vision in a different way. “For me, both [curating and designing] require an intuitive eye and a free hand in order to reflect the real and cosmopolitan world we live in,” Olowu says. “I feel very lucky and inspired to be able to do both.”

Olowu’s London boutique serves as inspiration for one of the later sections of “Seeing Chicago.” Some of his designs are displayed in that area, but they are far from the central focus. The bulk of the exhibit consists of almost 350 objects, all borrowed from local public and private collections. Most of them belong to the MCA, but many come from places such as the Art Institute of Chicago, Block Museum of Art, South Side Community Art Center, the National Museum of Mexican Art, the DuSable Museum of African American History, and Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art.

“I began with the idea of exposing and showcasing the amazing MCA Collection, which exemplifies this city’s original approach to contemporary art and culture,” Olowu says. “But I soon realized that a much more generous and open approach to the city’s public and private collections was necessary to honestly and justly convey the unique sensibility of museums and collectors in Chicago. The duty and

beauty of museums is to hold up a mirror to its audience regardless of social standing or class and create a unifying experience with local and international art in a way that is a source of pride for the people of the city. The MCA has given me the opportunity to create an exhibition that I hope is an example of this.”

Some of the featured artists include turn-of-the-century groundbreakers like Henri Matisse and René Magritte, and contemporary names such as David Hammons, Barbara Kruger, Ana Mendieta, and Fred Wilson. Even though there will be works from across the world, dozens of artists connected to Chicago will be on display. Amongst them are Dawoud Bey, Simone Leigh, and Kerry James Marshall as well as leaders of local movements AfriCOBRA and the Chicago Imagists. There will be rare surrealist art books by Duchamp, Giorgio de Chirico, and Salvador Dali. “That kind of international, or what we’ve been calling cosmopolitan and transcultural view of not only the history of art but also of the city, is very important,” Beckwith says.

The way Olowu displays his selection is an art in itself. Instead of the usual stark white cube, artworks are placed against colorful walls in shades of orange, purple, and teal. Paintings and photographs are installed vertically, or “salon-style,” in arrangements that promote unexpected conversations between the pieces.

“It’s so exciting for me to see a Matisse painting mirror an African sculpture. Starting to make those kinds of leaps into our imagination is going to be really incredible,” Beckwith says. “I don’t think we realize that when we go to museums, oftentimes the work that we see in one specific gallery or in one show is usually like for like. That is to say that all the works in African sculpture are in the African galleries. All the works by French painters of the late



Magdalene Odundo, Teardrop I, 1996. Collection The Art Institute of Chicago, © Magdalene Odundo

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Henri Matisse, *Laurette with a Cup of Coffee*, 1916-17. Collection The Art Institute Chicago, © 2019 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO/ART RESOURCE, NY

### continued from 11

19th century are in another gallery by themselves. All the pottery from Asia is either in the Asian gallery or in the decorative arts gallery. We began to separate things out in ways that feel logical, but what it doesn't often allow is

for things across cultures to speak to each other, or things across time periods to live with each other. Duro kind of ignored those basic art historical claims and just asked us to realize the affinities that art may have, across the country, across the world, across time." ■

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"I bow to this writer in gratitude." —SANDRA CISNEROS

## STATEWAY'S GARDEN

STORIES

### JASMON DRAIN



LIT

## Jasmon Drain makes his mark

His debut collection, *Stateway's Garden*, adds him to the ranks of Chicago's greatest authors.

By DMITRY SAMAROV

It's not often that a writer will make me see Chicago in a new way, but with his debut collection of interlocking stories, set primarily in Bronzeville's now-demolished Stateway Gardens housing project for which the book is named, Jasmon Drain has done just that. A young boy named Tracy is our primary guide and narrator, but by the end even the high-rises themselves become fully fleshed-out characters. Though sometimes dreamy with longing for the comforts of a childhood, which, from the outside, appears filled with privation, Drain—who grew up in

Englewood and now lives in Kenwood—has fashioned an indelible portrait of this city.

The looming presence over much of *Stateway's Garden* (Random House) is Tracy's mother. She haphazardly raises Tracy and his older half brother, Jacob, while focusing much of her attention on keeping her looks and finding a man who will stay. The lessons she imparts to her children are blunt and unsentimental. "Life isn't about fun. It's about money," she spits out at Jacob when the boy tries to refuse to go with her to a short-lived job at a store back on the west side, where

she'd grown up. To Tracy, who visits this store only once, it is a world of wonder, but to his mother it is but a tiresome means to an end. The chasm between an adult's perception and that of a child has rarely been evoked so precisely and heartbreakingly.

Tracy's overriding wish is for his mother to love him and pay him attention, but he observes her with a mixture of fascination and fear: "Mother stood slowly and put both hands to her knees to guide her legs straight. She released a groan while standing, then walked into the hall, past my bedroom, and made the left turn to the bathroom. She didn't shut the door. She hardly ever shut the door while in there." Here and through many other moments throughout these stories, Drain nails how strange, even foreign, those closest to us can be.

When Tracy and the other boys want to visit other parts of the city, they jump the fence and run across the Dan Ryan Expressway, dodging speeding cars, then vault over the barrier, taking care not to touch the third rail, onto the 35th Street CTA platform. It's a harrowing way to catch a public train, but these boys have no other means to experience places outside their immediate environment. Everyone in these stories is striving to find a better life, to get out of the projects, to live out their dreams. But it's not so easy to forget where you come from; nor do you necessarily want to, when being honest with yourself.

In the second-to-last story, "Love-Able Lip Gloss," Jacob, a beautiful cipher for much of the book, tells his story. Now an overweight, middle-aged man, he can't let go of his past as a youthful heartthrob. He carries on an on-again, off-again masochistic affair with his childhood sweetheart, a woman who managed to leave Stateway Gardens behind. But Jacob couldn't take the leap when given the opportunity and is stuck instead romanticizing the past and ruining what might have been. Jacob is but the last of the people Drain describes in all their complexity. He is not a writer who traffics in caricature or simplification.

I've known of the streets and buildings in this book for decades, but now feel like I've been there. Through slyly poetic language and an absolute grasp on place and description, Drain has added to the canon of Chicago literature. He belongs on the shelf next to Algren, Brooks, Dybek, and Wright—writers who know and love this city in all its magnificent contradictions, its unique, ugly beauty. **A**



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- SUN** MAR. 26 @ North Bar  
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- MON** MAR. 30 @ Rebuilding Exchange  
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- THU** APR. 2 @ North Bar  
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Maya Dukmasova and Ben Joravsky will host Mobilize: Super Tuesday Watch Party

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## Things to do

### COMEDY

### New Player Has Entered the Show

This show that combines video games and stand-up comedy celebrates its two-year anniversary. Performers include Joe Kilgallon, Samantha Berkman, Skyler Higley, and Sohrab Forouzesh. Challenge host Dane Arden to game of *Mario Tennis 64* after the show for a chance to win his Nintendo Switch. [Wed 3/4, 8 PM, Emporium Wicker Park, 1366 N. Milwaukee, facebook.com/newplayershow. FREE](#)

### So Emo

Yaz Bat hosts this variety show featuring music, comedy, and drag from past and current emo kids. The lineup includes Sharron Palm, Elias Rios, Mike Stricker, Fauz Pa, and Emma Grace and the night also includes raffles and an emo costume contest. [Mon 3/2, 8 PM, Elixir Andersonville, 1509 W. Balmoral, facebook.com/soemolol, \\$10, \\$5 in advance.](#)

### VHS: Leap to the Future

Enjoy some of the best Leap Day-themed VHS clips with stand-up from Tucker Brookshire, Lucia Whalen, Chris Santiago, and Clare Austen-Smith. [Sat 2/29, 10 PM, the Lincoln Lodge, 2040 N. Milwaukee, thelincolnlodge.com, \\$7.](#)

### DANCE

### Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Four programs from the Ailey repertoire, featuring a mix of ten different pieces, make up this year's visit to the Auditorium. The pieces include the midwest premiere of Jamar Roberts's *Ode*, a meditation on the beauty of life in a time of gun violence; Aszure Barton's *BUSK*, an ensemble work on "the fragility, tenderness, and resilience that exist within the human experience"; a revival of Judith Jamison's 1984 piece *Divining*, using dance idioms from across Africa; Donald Byrd's *Greenwood*, exploring the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre; *Ella*, Ailey artistic director Robert Battle's duet set to music by Ella Fitzgerald; founder Ailey's masterpiece, *Revelations*, which premiered in 1960 and has been the company's signature work, and more. [3/4-3/8: Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 2 and 8 PM, Sun 3 PM, Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Ida B. Wells, auditoriumtheatre.org, \\$35-\\$130.](#)

### Trinity Irish Dance Company

Three world premieres and one Chicago premiere make up this program from Trinity Irish Dance, celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Choreographers Michelle Dorrance and Melinda Sullivan's *American Traffic* combines Irish step and American tap. Irish dancer and choreographer Colin Dunne premieres *Listen*, described as "a deconstruction of Irish dance with respect for the ancestors." TIDC founding artistic director Mark Howard and associate artistic director Chelsea Hoy collaborated on the world premiere of *Home*, "a percussive tour de force where every-

body brings something to the table." In its Chicago premiere, *Goddess*, choreographed by Sean Curran, blends Irish and Indian movement traditions. [Sat 2/29, 2 and 7:30 PM, Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Ida B. Wells, auditoriumtheatre.org, \\$35-\\$78.](#)

### LIT

### Colloquium Under a Palm Tree: A Reading

A reading responding to writer Gloria Anzaldúa's text "La Prieta" from the 1983 anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983), and Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz's ideas on "transculturation." With Minh Nguyen, Jacobo Zambrano-Rangel, Andres Hernandez, Natalia Piland, and Jeremy Sublewski. [Wed 3/4, 6:30 PM, Threewalls, 2738 W. North, three-walls.org. FREE](#)

### My America: Sawako Nakayasu

In conjunction with the exhibition, "My America: Immigrant and Refugee Writers Today" artist Sawako Nakayasu will be giving a perspective of writing and translating. [Tue 3/3, 6:30 PM, American Writers Museum, 180 N. Michigan, second floor, americanwritersmuseum.org, \\$10, free for members.](#)

### Pecha Kucha Night (Vol. 53)

A dozen presenters from all walks of life are given the chance to explain their work using 20 slides. This edition features photographer Jeff Phillips, artist Shannon Downey, artist Darryl Moody, and Sam and Eli Merritt, cofounders of the Chicago Maker Space. [Tue 3/3, 8 PM, Martyrs, 3855 N. Lincoln, martyrslive.com, \\$12, \\$10 in advance.](#)

### Zine Club Chicago: Fascination Edition

Zine Club Chicago meets this month to discuss zines that make them excited and happy. Bring your favorite zine and join the conversation. Snacks are included. [Thu 2/27, 7 PM, Quimby's Bookstore, 1854 W. North, quimbys.com.FREE](#)

### PARTIES

### Charlie & the Hashbrown Factory: 10th Annual Spudnik Press Chili Cook-Off

Spudnik is hosting their unforgettable chili cook-off for their tenth year. Sixteen competing chefs will be challenged to make the best chili. Featured galleries and creative outlets in the cook-off are Candor Arts, Chicago Printers Guild, Hyde Park Art Center, Rohner Press, and One Design. [Sat 2/29, 5-9 PM, Spudnik Press, 1821 W. Hubbard, spudnikpress.com, \\$40, \\$25 for artists and anyone 21 and under, \\$8 for kids 6-16, kids 5 and under free.](#)

### Moans: All Trans Showcase

Featuring an all trans cast of performers, DJs, and vendors, Moans celebrates trans people of all variance. Tunes by Ariel Zetina, Hinkypunk (Kyah Hawk) as guest co-host, and Alex Jenny, Zolita (Zola Chatman), Loki Loko (Miles Billedo), and vendors Lucy Stooles, JForPay Designs, and Gnat Glitter Kink. [Thu 2/27, 10 PM-1 AM,](#)

[Berlin, 954 W. Belmont, berlinchicago.com.](#)

### Mobilize: Super Tuesday Watch Party

Watch the delegates roll in with the Reader's own Ben Joravsky and Maya Dukmasova. A livestream will be available to view on our Facebook page. [Tue 3/3, 6-8 PM, the Promontory, 5311 S. Lake Park, facebook.com/chicagoreader. FREE](#)

### Superhero Fetish After-Hours at the LA&M

A&M will be hosting a fetish superhero event which coincides with C2E2. Revolution Brewing has donated beer for the event (as well as wine, soda, and water). Superhero or cosplay attire is highly encouraged. [Fri 2/28, 6-9 PM, Leather Archives and Museum, 6418 N. Greenview, leatherarchives.org. FREE](#)

### VISUAL ARTS

### "Fenestrated Shape"

Robin Hustle describes her work as "soft rock monuments," in ceramic form. She is a community health nurse, writer, and ceramicist whose work has covered foraging, sex work, emotional labor, health, gender, and nurturance. [Opening reception Sat 2/29, 6-9 PM, 2/29-3/21, Thu 4-7 PM, Sat 1-4 PM, Roman Susan, 1224 W. Loyola, romansusan.org. FREE](#)

### 50th Anniversary Celebration of John Cage's HPSCHD

This free multimedia performance takes place at Preston Bradley Hall marking the 50th anniversary of this immersive piece by John Cage and computer pioneer Lejaren Hiller. [Sat 2/29, 1-4 PM, Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington, chicagoculturalcenter.org. FREE](#)

### "Homo-entanglement"

In galleries one and two, married collaborators Miller & Shellabarger look at romance, physicality, duality, and time in their work. Utilizing performance, photography, books, and sculpture, the pair focus on queer identities and experiences. [Opening reception 2/29, 5-8 PM, 2/29-3/11, Tue-Sat 11 AM-6 PM, Western Exhibitions, 1709 W. Chicago, westernexhibitions.com. FREE](#)

### "Pottery of Protest"

The pottery studio hosts its third annual Protest Exhibition where students and staff will present their work. The show is inspired by politics, environmentalism, racism, sexism, and other sociopolitical concerns. All proceeds from this opening will go towards Inner-City Muslim Action Network. Snacks will be provided. [Sat 2/29, 7-10 PM, Lincoln Square Pottery Studio, 4150 N. Lincoln, comeplaywithclay.com. FREE](#)

### Studio MODA: The 2020 Winter Fashion Show

MODA's annual Winter Fashion Show draws more than 1,000 guests from UChicago and beyond. The show will include a cocktail reception, a runway show modeling designs by students, and an after-party. [Fri 2/28, 8-10 PM, Zhou B Art Center, 1029 W. 35th, modachicago.org, \\$30. R](#)





## DANCE PREVIEW

# *American Traffic* celebrates the intersection of Irish and African American dance

Trinity Irish Dance Company's world premiere steps out at the Auditorium.

BY IRENE HSIAO

In the 19th century, amid social unrest, crime, and infectious disease in the lower Manhattan neighborhood of Five Points in New York City, an American dance was brewing. The source of this new creative energy was a combination of cultures colliding and competition. “Black people and Irish people were on the street corner together, in the music halls together, in the pubs together,” notes choreographer Michelle Dorrance. “And Irish were referred to as Blacks, and Black dancing was called jigging.” In the 1840s, a series of contests, or “challenge dances,” spearheaded by Irish dancer John Diamond (sometimes referred to as the “greatest white minstrel dancer”) brought the blackface performer head-to-head with the young man who replaced him in P.T. Barnum’s show, William Henry

Lane, known as “Master Juba.” Juba roundly triumphed over the ill-tempered Irishman in all but one contest, staged in cities nationwide. Described by Charles Dickens as “the greatest dancer known,” Juba gained worldwide fame as the only Black dancer in all-white minstrel companies and the first Black performer to be billed above a white performer in minstrel shows.

“Tap dance was born on the southern slave plantations,” says Dorrance. “A lot of slave uprisings were organized by drums, [which were] central to West African culture.” Body percussion, or “patting juba,” arose as drums were outlawed by plantations. “Tap dance was born in that dire need for expression and communication,” she explains. “And those famous contests between African American dancers

and Irish dancers in the 1800s pushed tap and American Irish dance forward. It’s sewn into the history of tap dance. Early tap, then called ‘buck dancing’ or ‘buck and wing,’ lives on the balls of the feet, which is where Irish dance lives. Juba was able to imitate the Irish dancers’ approach to buck dance. And he would imitate them imitating him. Who knows what kind of masterful mockery that was? He was described as doing things people had never seen—he was a masterful innovator. Tap dance is rooted in improvisation. That kind of conversation with the feet is part of the development of the form. It lives in those early contests.”

These thoughts of cultural exchange drove the creation of *American Traffic*, a new work commissioned by the Auditorium Theatre for Chicago’s Trinity Irish Dance Company by Dor-

Trinity Irish Dance Company LOIS GREENFIELD

rance, a MacArthur Fellow and artistic director of Dorrance Dance, and Dorrance artistic associate Melinda Sullivan. “Trinity Irish Dance Company is a contemporary Irish American company rooted in the traditions of Irish step dance,” explains TIDC associate artistic director Chelsea Hoy. “We push the boundaries of the form through a performing arts lens. One way we do that is by collaborating with movers from different genres. Michelle Dorrance’s work bears similarities to ours in the way that it honors the ancestors.”

“We were interested in breaking down the rigidity and traditional carriage of Irish step dancing,” says Dorrance. “We wanted to explore a pedestrian quality. The execution of Irish dance is so beautiful but often rigid. The arms are held. In tap, we often have a relaxed upper body and an organic approach.” The title of the work began as a joke, she says—simply a way of organizing the negotiation and exploration of space. “The rule was, when they would pass each other, pass on the right—literally ‘American traffic.’ But it became this thing that reflected a culture that has such depth in its ancestry. Tap is one of the oldest—in terms of immigrated Americans—American dance forms. There’s constant exploration in the piece, and exploration of identity. It’s not about some heavy emotional drama, it just lives in the fiber of the work.”

The exploration of technique and identity is central to TIDC’s mission of innovation in Irish American dance. TIDC was founded in 1990 by Yorkshire-born, Rogers Park-raised Mark Howard, who studied at the Dennehy School of Irish Dance—where fellow Irish American Chicagoan Michael Flatley also trained. Whereas Flatley’s *Riverdance* became a global phenomenon when it premiered in 1995, Howard has refused traditional Irish dance competitions and Broadway-style spectacles. “We’re the only art-driven ensemble repertory Irish dance company in the world,” says Hoy.

“How are you still doing what you love when [*Riverdance*] turned into this multimillion dollar thing?” Dorrance recalls asking Howard. “He replied, ‘We just want people to connect with what we do.’ And I thought, ‘That’s exactly what I feel about my art form.’ To exchange the roots of our culture, the rhythmic ideas, to learn more about our techniques, where they came from, and why—that’s fascinating.”

@IreneCHsiao



Harold Mendez

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## THEATER



*I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* 📷 LOWELL THOMAS

### PREVIEW

## Breaking free from the ribbons of grief

*I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* follows a Latinx teen as she struggles for her own identity.

By **MARISSA DE LA CERDA**

In 2017, young Latinx people entered the mind of Julia Reyes, the protagonist in Erika L. Sánchez's *New York Times* best-selling novel, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*. Now through March 21, they can enter her world and serve as her confidant in

the stage adaptation premiering at Steppenwolf, as part of the Steppenwolf for Young Adults series. (Sandra Marquez directs.)

The story follows teenager Julia, an aspiring writer from Chicago who is often seen as rebellious and a nuisance by her family, as she



## THEATER

grieves the death of her older more traditional sister, Olga. She also attempts to find herself in a world that tries to keep her identity confined to specific boxes of what a Mexican American daughter should and shouldn't be. Throughout this path of self-discovery, she faces adversity in mental health, domestic violence, and sexual trauma—topics that are widely dismissed and seen as taboo in Latinx households.

"[These topics] are what I think has brought the book so much popularity over the last few years," says playwright Isaac Gómez. "It resonates because of all of the various

**I AM NOT YOUR PERFECT MEXICAN DAUGHTER**  
2/26-3/21: Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 3 and 7:30 PM; also Sun 3/1, 3 PM, Steppenwolf Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted, 312-335-1650, [steppenwolf.org](http://steppenwolf.org), \$20-\$30, \$15 students.

intersection points, especially for people who identify as Mexican, Mexican American, or Latinx."

Gómez, who says he has read the book around 18 or 20 times, wanted to embody the world that Sánchez created and include all of the central themes that make the protagonist's journey so challenging. This is especially important because although not everyone's upbringing was the same as Julia's, a lot of the struggles she faces ring true for many. Gómez, for example, says despite being a man raised in a home with four boys "there were some things that Julia said about not being the perfect Mexican daughter that allowed me to connect with her, especially because I was an aspiring writer who struggled with mental health and because I was someone who just wanted to get out and dream."

Similar to Julia, many first-generation Americans face this pressure to adhere to specific standards of both their culture and the American culture while simultaneously having to provide for their families and put their dreams aside. First-generation daughters, specifically, have a harder time shedding these limitations and remain tied down by old-fashioned roles.

This is what makes Julia so inspiring to many Latinx individuals. "We have this Mexican girl who is 15 and grappling with ribbons of grief," says Karen Rodriguez, longtime collaborator of Gómez's and the actress playing

Julia in the play. "Part of her grief and part of her struggle is that she is so unabashedly herself and won't let others put her in a box, even if it comes at great pain and great disconnect for her family and friends."

Gómez sent her the novel when he had first decided to adapt it into a play. "I read it and I just felt like Julia, Erika, and I were like kindred spirits," Rodriguez says. "There's something about Julia and the way that she talks and the way that her mind works that felt like projects Isaac and I had worked on before."

Gómez says Rodriguez was a crucial part of his adaptation process because of their shared backgrounds. The two are from border cities between Texas and Mexico (Gómez grew up in El Paso, Rodriguez in Matamoros, across the border from Brownsville) and know what it's like to feel like they're from two places and everywhere all at once. "Every play I've written, except one, has featured Karen in some capacity because she brings so much energy into everything she does," he says. "She brings a piece of home in everything she does."

But another aspect of the adaptation process was getting the rights from Sánchez herself. Luckily, the author and current Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz chair at DePaul University trusted in Gómez immediately. "As soon as I met Isaac, I felt like I could trust him with the story, and he put so much care in transforming it in a way that was respectful and very true to the original vision," Sánchez says.

Though the material remains the same, some changes were made to fit the medium. This includes adding asides, since the novel is told from the first-person point of view. But according to Gómez and Rodriguez, this allows the audience to actively serve as Julia's confidant as she finds her voice.

More than anything, what Gómez, Sánchez, and Rodriguez hope audiences gain from the play is a chance to feel seen in a new medium. "I think it's really great that so many young people of color are going to see the play. I find that really moving for me because when I was growing up, I didn't really have that," says Sanchez. "I never saw any plays that were related to my communities or who I was, and so the fact that so many young people are going to have access to it is something that makes me feel really proud." 

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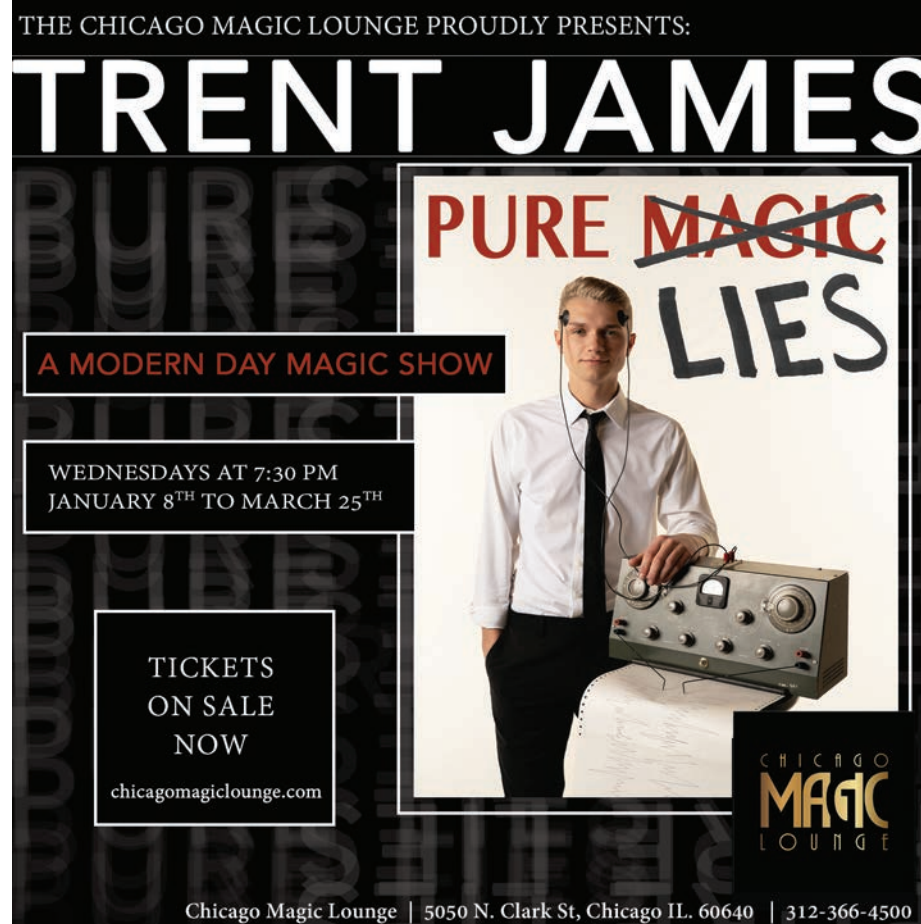
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## REVIEW

### Sister acts

In *Plano*, three siblings share lives with messy men in an endless loop.

By KAYLEN RALPH

As one of three sisters, I feel uniquely qualified to review the chaotic choreography of dialogue that constitutes *Plano*, First Floor Theater's presentation of the Chicago premiere of Will Arbery's play, directed by Audrey Francis.

*Plano* is a story about Anne, Genevieve, and Isabel, three "sisters and friends" with a lot going on, thanks (or no thanks?) to the messy men in their lives: Juan, Steve, and God (represented as a "Faceless Ghost" and played by An-

dréw Lund), respectively. The cadence of conversation between these three Catholic-raised sisters is slapdash but urgent in delivery, while solutions for what's discussed are often put off until "later." Life passes in a continuous, looping conversational style.

**RR PLANO** Through 3/28: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3:30 PM; also Mon 3/2, 3/16, and 3/23, 8 PM, Steppenwolf 1700 Theatre, 1700 N. Halsted, 312-335-1650, [steppenwolf.org](https://steppenwolf.org), \$25-\$35, \$20 students, \$15 industry.

missed a ping from one of my own two sisters.

The *Plano* sisters' updates about their lives, all delivered from Genevieve's front porch, are stretched across space and time through smart staging and the telltale tones of their iPhones, the trill of FaceTime unmistakable (kudos to sound designer Eric Backus) as Anne and Genevieve check in with Isabel. She's fled to Chicago to do the Lord's work with women in need, while her two older sisters remain in Texas, worried about their husbands' multiple personalities that haunt their homes and the streets of Plano. There is a sci-fi, futuristic, and impossible wash to this hypermodern production that works, despite its abject juxtaposition with the pastoral porch setting. There is strobe lighting, modern dance, and honky tonk.

As anyone with sisters close in age will tell you, that's how conversations amongst us go. You listen urgently because you care, but also because you're perhaps waiting for your turn to talk. This dynamic, as demonstrated between Anne (Elizabeth Birnkrant), Genevieve (Ashley Neal), and Isabel (Amanda Fink), is so authentic that I felt myself getting anxious halfway through the performance, worried I'd perhaps

"It's later now," is a constant refrain slipped into the run-on dialogue (fans of *Gilmore Girls* will love this production's verbal rhythms), and that refrain is the only true marker of the passage of time. The sisters' exchanges are productive insofar as they are cathartic—these sisters are close and they care for each other—but resolution is fraught, which I appreciated. You don't need sisters to accept that life is messy and men are unmanageable, let alone multiples of the same disappointing husband. While none of the women are genuinely happy in their respective domestic scenarios (is anyone?), they are happy to have each other. **FI**

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# THEATER



Dex & Abby 📸 HEATHER MALL

## OPENING

### A dog's play

*Dex & Abby* is too inane to charm.

Normally, in a fantasy life, you obsess over your pets. Dog cloning figures largely in the mind anytime I think about how it would feel to be Barbra Streisand, personally. But there comes a point in any conversation with a decadent person—around hour two, perhaps—when you wonder if or when this fascinating individual will move on from dog talk and feed you dinner. That moment never comes in *Dex & Abby*, a 130-minute tepid fiasco, written by Allan Baker and directed by Daniel Washelesky.

Less a play than a live-action doggy-themed greeting card, this show imagines what it would be like if a rich gay couple, Sean and Corey, moved in together, and if their dogs, who can talk, took a while to become friends. Daniel Vaughn Manasia and Chesa Greene as the titular pooch duo can wag those behinds all they want: they're dressed normally, their lines are inane garbage, and I just didn't buy that they were dogs and neither did anybody else. Sure, they're cute. But so is actual character development. So is costume design.

The overall weakness of the thing turns unsettling at times, as when Sean (Josh Pablo Szabo) tries to win an argument with Corey (Jesse Montoya) about whose experience of struggle is more valid by shouting point-blank into his partner's face, "I'm a crack whore's son!" Or when an inexplicable foldout bed emerges from the wall, stays in the scene for two quick and vapid cuddle scenes, then retracts once more, never to be seen again. —**MAX MALLER** *DEX & ABBY* Through 3/29: Thu-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 8 PM, Sun 2:30 PM, *The Broadway at Pride Arts Center, 4139 N. Broadway, 800-737-0984, pridefilmsandplays.com, \$40 premium reserved, \$30 general reserved, \$25 students and seniors (not valid Sat).*

**RR** Garden of unearthly delights  
Actors Gymnasium's winter show is not to be missed.

Actors Gymnasium primarily functions as a training school in the circus arts, but they put on a full-length show for an extended run every winter. And in the case of *The Ghost in Gadsden's Garden*, you'd be a fool to miss it. A reclusive gardener, Gadsden (Adrian Danzig) spends his days tending the beautiful flowers on the grounds of an old (and allegedly haunted) mansion. And indeed, his interactions with the lovely ghost Vivian (Hayley Larson) provide the only semi-human contact he enjoys. But when Kid (Grace Sherman) creeps past the gate on a dare from classmates, they discover that Vivian may not be what Gadsden thinks.

With echoes of Oscar Wilde's fable "The Selfish Giant" mixed with ecology lessons (Lucy Carapetyan plays Kid's supportive science teacher), writers Chris Mathews (who also directs) and Sully Ratke incorporate the natural and supernatural with seamless aplomb.

Larson's aerial work on the silks is particularly breathtaking, and Carapetyan joins with acrobatics creating clever physical metaphors for various scientific relationships, from symbiotic to parasitic. (Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi created the circus interludes, with Kasey Foster choreographing dances to Kevin O'Donnell's original sound and music.) The teen ensemble plays various impish garden flora and Kid's Scooby Gang of tormentors-turned-allies with assured wit and charm. Danzig, cofounder of the beloved 500 Clown troupe, brings poignant charm to his lonely aging Gadsden. The entire show is a treat for the eyes and heart from beginning to end. —**KERRY REID** *THE GHOST IN GADSDEN'S GARDEN* Through 3/22: Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 4:30 and 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM, *Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes, Evanston, 847-328-2795, actorsgymnasium.com, \$28, \$18 students.*

**RR** Cleveland rocks  
Factory explores the Rust Belt, karaoke-style.

I guess a bad play could be written about the hostile overthrow of a Cleveland Heights karaoke bar at the hands of a hard-cider magnate named Ethan, whose

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**READER**





business card says, “purveyor of fine spirits and sophisticated settings.” I don’t see how, though. Some ideas are just too good. Regardless, Mike Beyer and Kirk Pyncheon haven’t written that bad play. Factory Theater’s *Last Night in Karaoke Town*, directed by Kim Boler, is a fantastic play, one that gets to the heart of so many issues that matter, such as what varieties of taxidermy should be allowed in bars (squirrels? buffalo?), who gets to sing Natalie Imbruglia’s “Torn” when both Audrey and Lily claim it as “mine, bitch,” and whether the rusted-out factory your dad used to work in getting rebuilt as an REI is OK if you happen to like shopping at REI. You know, the important stuff.

The rainbow of die-hards hanging out at owner Diana’s joint could carry a production by themselves, so rife are they with quirks and infighting and opinions about Van Halen. And then you have Ethan, played by Tommy Bullington, who saunters in one fine day with his crates of pear cider and long black shawl to inform Diana (Wendy Hayne) that he’s bought the building and intends to refine its spirits and sophisticate its settings. What follows is a raucous showdown between the dual opposing forces of innovation and authenticity. I can’t say who wins. I can say that I laughed so hard at everything Bullington did that I thought I would be asked to leave the theater. —**MAX MALLER** *LAST NIGHT IN KARAOKE TOWN* Through 3/28: Fri-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3 PM, Factory Theater, 1623 W. Howard, 866-811-4111, thefactorytheater.com, \$25, \$18 students and seniors.

**RR** Love among the ruins  
The cocreator of *Russian Doll* lands a masterpiece.

“I would let [insert name here] ruin my life” is a phrase that anyone who’s radiated their eyes with thirsty comments online over the past few years will recognize as a hallmark of the genre. What does it mean? If Dex (Michael Vizzi) and Shellie (Allison Plott) feel that way about each other in Leslye Headland’s *The Layover*—a total masterpiece, ultimately just as devastating as it is hot—presented by The Comrades under Drew Shirley’s direction, as I contend they do, what does that feeling entail? Is it a disease? Is that, heaven help us, what love is now?

If I would let you ruin my life, I’m obviously looking for trouble already. Dex’s engagement to Andrea (Emma Jo Boyden) is over the second he sits down with Shellie at the bar in O’Hare after their Thanksgiving flight gets cancelled. You get the sense he would have let anyone ruin his life, given half the chance. Shellie’s life is practically in ruins already—she’s the full-time caregiver to an epileptic father (the amazing Jim Morley), unhappily married, tied down in every sense. She’s got a fair bit of one of Headland’s other protagonists in her: Natasha Lyonne’s character in the Netflix series *Russian Doll*, which Headland cocreated with Lyonne and Amy Poehler.

Dex, Shellie, and Lyonne’s Nadia Vulvokov are all alike—deacons in the church of “ruin my life.” But crack that pained thought open, and you see what it really is saying: *I would let you kindle these dead nerve endings again. I would let you see if I’m still here.* —**MAX MALLER** *THE LAYOVER* Through 3/22: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 2:30 PM, Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln, 773-404-7336, greenhousecenter.org, \$20.

**RR** The elephant’s graveyard  
*Mlima’s Tale* shows the costs of the ivory trade.

This Lynn Nottage drama is pure kinetic energy, exploring the illicit ivory trade through the haunting death of Mlima, an African elephant. Griffin Theatre Company’s production, a midwest premiere directed by Jerrell L. Henderson, thrives on its use of movement, sound, and staging to illustrate our shared complicity in the poaching of a vulnerable species. Mlima, whose name means “mountain” in Swahili, is played by a mostly silent David Goodloe, who looms large, literally, over the entire 90 minutes. He’s the show’s emotional canvas, employing ethereal, athletic movements and an intense, textured gaze that as reads both accusatory and mournful. As Mlima’s tusks become increasingly objectified, Goodloe turns his body into a floppy piece of meat, resigned and exhausted.

A tight, propulsive story, this production leverages a capable ensemble of six to bring to life the entire chain of events from Mlima’s death in Kenya to the unveiling of an ivory carving in the home of a wealthy collector across the world. By bringing so many people and geog-

*The Secret of My Success* **■** LIZ LAUREN

raphies under the tent of this shameful practice, from police to park rangers to government officials to pilots, Nottage makes the world a bit smaller and the tragedy less abstract. As does her insertion of well-researched and disturbing facts, like poachers using tourists’ safari photos on social media to locate their prey. After absorbing the question an ivory dealer asks a collector—What price are you willing to pay for beauty?—you’ll walk away questioning the provenance and unknown costs of any rare valuables you possess. —**MARISSA OBERLANDER** *MLIMA’S TALE* Through 3/21: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM; also Mon 3/16, 7:30 PM, Raven Theatre, 6157 N. Clark, 866-811-4111, griffintheatre.com, \$38, \$33 students, seniors, and veterans.

**Death Potion No. 9**  
*Poison* tells the story of lethal women.

In 2013, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Deborah Blum wrote an article for *Wired* magazine titled “The Imperfect Myth of the Female Poisoner” that dispelled the persistent cultural assumption that, as far as murder methods go, homicides-by-poisoning are inherently ladylike. “It’s not, you see, that poison is a woman’s weapon,” says Blum. “It’s that it is an evil one.” And yet, dubiously sourced in historical criminology as they may be, there’s something wickedly satisfying and elegantly badass about artistic depictions of women dispensing revenge with perfume-like vials of death.

In that respect, in this 90-minute dark dramedy set in 17th century Paris, playwright Dusty Wilson has his cake and eats it too, indulging in a fantasy of outlaw women paving their own way while also wrestling with the gender and class-based roles that permit justice for some while dooming others. A talented chemist (Carina Lastimoso) and her tarot-card-reading lover (Lynnette Li) create a cottage industry helping wealthy women murder their plutocrat husbands. Christina Casano’s production for The Plagiarists keeps the grisly consequences of its protagonists’ actions at arm’s length for the most part, focusing instead on their justifications and nights spent spritzing toxic plants in a sparse but romantic hamlet tucked on the outskirts of society. A framing device featuring an interrogator (Bryan Brea) doesn’t quite reach the emotional contrasts Casano and company seem to be aiming for, but there’s some decent fun to be had with a flamboyant rival poisoner (Julia Stemper) and a naive woman of leisure (Brittani Yawn). —**DAN JAKES** *POISON* Through 3/14: Thu-Fri 8 PM, Sat 2 and 8 PM; also Mon 3/2 and 3/9, 8 PM (industry performances), Berger Park Cultural Center, 6205 N. Sheridan, theplagiarists.org, pay what you can.

**RR** Carry that weight  
The aftermath of a police shooting shatters a picture-book marriage.

Ruby (Brooke Reams) and Wilson (Kevin Tre’Von Patterson) seem to have a picture-book marriage. While their daughter is away at summer camp, they plan on trying for another baby. But when Ruby’s best friend, Claire (Deveon Bromby), comes to stay a few weeks while recovering from the loss of a husband shot by a white cop, the couple’s seemingly blissful existence is shattered.

Christopher Burris directs this midwest Redtwist premiere of *Rabbit Summer*, Tracey Conyer Lee’s tense,

funny, and angry 2018 relationship drama, which, rather than shying away from facing some of the most complex and systemic issues plaguing this country, takes them all head-on. When it’s not dealing with gun violence, it’s addressing racism; then, for a breather, it tackles infidelity, abortion, and absent fathers. In less-capable hands, this material would have sunk under its own weight, but Lee has fashioned three characters who can pick it up, lift it, and keep going. It is a testament to these three talented actors that no matter how heavy the message they’re tasked with delivering, I never felt for a moment that they were less than fully-formed human beings rather than conduits for information.

Wilson’s prized chifforobe—passed down for generations and used at one time to shelter runaway slaves in its false backing—is the central metaphor and physical manifestation of the warring forces facing African Americans in this country. It conceals as much as it reveals. It carries a weighty load, but with its doors flung open is ready to take on whatever comes. —**DMITRY SAMAROV** *RABBIT SUMMER* Through 3/22: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM; also Mon 3/2, 7:30 PM (industry), and Tue 3/10, 7:30 PM (understudy), Redtwist Theatre, 1044 W. Bryn Mawr, 773-728-7529, redtwist.org, \$35-\$40, \$5 off for students and seniors.

**Not so successful**  
A Michael J. Fox 1980s film gets a cliched musical makeover.

This musical version of the 1987 Michael J. Fox vehicle, receiving its world premiere at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora, tells a sweet, lighthearted story—plucky young man climbs the ladder of success from mail room to executive suite—that feels a lot like an updated version of Frank Loesser’s 1961 Broadway hit *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, only without the bite or wit or heart. Where *How to Succeed* at least attempted to satirize American corporate culture (and largely fell short), *The Secret of My Success* is content to tell a story that would barely sustain one episode in a sitcom. Even though the story touches on some of the more devastating aspects of contemporary business (layoffs, plant closings, kleptocratic leadership), the show remains relatively toothless.

Part of the problem is the show’s bland, cliché-filled book by Gordon Greenberg (who also directs) and Steve Rosen. You just can’t tell an interesting story if you are content to give us, without irony, a show full of stock characters and predictable plot twists. The show’s forgettable score, by Michael Mahler and Alan Schmuckler, is less shallow than the book, though at times the songs often feel like pastiches of better-known pop tunes of the last 50 years. Still, the tunes are ear pleasing, and the lyrics are frequently playful and witty.

A larger problem though is that the show’s story and message—the vanity of success, the importance of integrity and love—is too intimate for the big stage, and gets lost in all the singing and dancing and general Broadway glitz. Heidi Ketterring and Sydney Morton, as the two major female characters in the show, do a great job bringing heart and fire to the show. But Billy Harrigan Tighe brings no heat to his portrayal of the lead; again and again we found ourselves yearning for Michael J. Fox’s sly Alex Keatonish charm. —**JACK HELBIG** *THE SECRET OF MY SUCCESS* Through 3/29: Wed 1:30 and 7 PM, Thu 7 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 3 and 8 PM, Sun 1 and 5:30 PM, Paramount Theatre, 23 E. Galena Blvd., Aurora, 630-896-6666, paramountaurora.com, \$36-\$74. **■**





## REVIEW

# Kantemir Balagov solidifies his signature style with *Beanpole*

The Russian filmmaker's second feature explores the atrocities of war.

By KATHLEEN SACHS

Several minutes into Kantemir Balagov's first feature, *Closeness* (2017), the young director makes himself known. "My name is Kantemir Balagov," reads an onscreen text. "I am a Kabardian." Set in Balagov's hometown of Nalchik, the capital of the North Caucasus republic of Kabardino-Balkaria where the film's real-life events took place, *Closeness* follows the family of a young Jewish man who gets kidnapped and held for ransom against the run-up to the Second Chechen War. The film has little in common plot-wise with Balagov's second feature, *Beanpole*. Still, I was reminded of Balagov's rather bold decision to start his debut feature with that personal declaration—a new, young talent (he was then, and is still, in his mid-20s) introducing himself to the world.

Balagov's sophomore effort secures his place as an endeavoring auteur. Inspired by Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich's 1985 oral history of Russian women who fought during World War II, *The Unwomanly Face of War* (which Balagov read while studying under Russian filmmaker Alexander Sokurov), *Beanpole*, cowritten by Balagov and Aleksandr Terekhov, continues the former's speculative and near-sociological examination of contiguous suffering. *Closeness* focuses on the sister of the kidnapping victim, while *Beanpole* centers around two young women soldiers in the aftermath of World War II. These aren't mere character studies, however; what's on the surface—those

cinematic qualities of image and sound—are just as integral as the protagonists' inner lives.

Set in Leningrad in the fall of 1945, following the end of the war, the film considers the fraught relationship between the titular Beanpole, Iya (newcomer Viktoria Miroshnichenko, a singular presence), and Masha (Vasilisa Perelygina, a similarly beguiling newcomer), both of whom were among the 800,000 women who served in the Soviet Armed Forces during World War II. *Beanpole* opens with a medium close-up of Iya, frozen, while women around her go about their daily business. Someone attempts to rouse her; the camera pulls back to reveal her towering height in comparison to the other women—hence the nickname "Beanpole," which, in Russian, also means clumsy, a descriptor Balagov has said represents a post-war state of physical and mental unease. At the beginning, Iya is shown to be a nurse in a veteran's hospital, taking care of Pashka, a young boy who seems to be her son. But after she accidentally smothers him during a freezing fit, Masha comes back from the front, and we learn that Pashka was actually hers.

It speaks to the atrocities of war and its aftermath—and Balagov's distinctive handling of it—that the boy's death is not the catalyst for a pronounced, guilt-ridden breakdown between the two women, but rather the impetus of an odd codependent relationship, born of immense suffering, that the filmmakers don't

**BEANPOLE ★★★**  
Dir. Kantemir Balagov, 138 min.  
Playing 2/28-3/5, Gene Siskel Film Center

## Beanpole

exploit for cinematic tension. This sets the tone for the rest of the film, which, in addition to handling the protagonists' trauma, reveals the suffering of those around them. All this manifests in Masha's frenzied desire to have another child, which she convinces Iya to bear for her because she's now unable to conceive due to injuries sustained during the war. Masha's desire for new life and Iya's awkward desire to "master" Masha, as she admits later in the film (an inclination that could be viewed as a warped romantic overture), speak to how each is processing her respective trauma.

The story is compounded by Balagov's imposing visual aesthetic, which was evident in *Closeness* but here is on a whole new level. The striking mise-en-scène features intimate handheld camerawork, sullen long takes, bold lighting, and bright, painterly colors, specifically red (which signifies blood and death) and green (which signifies life). But above these aspects, I most admire how Balagov captures the characters' physicality, from Iya's freezing fits

throughout the film to Masha's manic twirling during a particularly intense scene; the latter moment recalls one from *Closeness*, in which its female protagonist, feeling frustrated, dances wildly in a nightclub. More minute actions, like Iya's hands on a dying soldier's neck or Masha's elusive smiles, often framed in visceral close-up, draw one into the intimacies of their being; that both women are played by first-time actresses is extraordinary.

It's these vagaries that differentiate Balagov from filmmakers who use such idiosyncrasies in an almost gimmicky fashion. Contrary to the marketing for the film—such as a teaser trailer that combines certain scenes and sounds in a misleading way—Balagov is not mining the scenario for its inherent weirdness. It's there, to be sure, but it's not meant to shock or awe. Nor is the film overtly political—there are oblique references to communism, but there's no mention of Stalin. If anything, it's rather plaintive and unequivocal, the anomalies of life after trauma. "My name is Kantemir Balagov," I can almost see on the screen, this time at the end of the film. "And it's as straightforward as this." **A**

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## NOW PLAYING

### Brahms: The Boy II

The Boy is back in town. And, oh, how we missed Brahms, the porcelain doll with a wardrobe so dandy he's able to coax Liza (Katie Holmes) and Sean (Owain Yeoman) into letting their son Jude (Christopher Convery) keep him. This is, of course, a huge mistake, which they may have realized if they considered sooner that Brahms was found in a shallow grave outside a dilapidated estate watched over by creepy caretaker Joseph (Ralph Ineson). Shit inevitably gets weird, working its way to a supernatural crescendo that unfortunately erases the ingenious twist of the third act from 2016's *The Boy*. What the film's director William Brent Bell and writer Stacey Menear do get right, however, is Brahms's ability to endear himself to those around him. Wait to stream the sequel, but know it's in preparation for what's gearing up to become a full-blown franchise, which promises to give the people what they want—more Brahms. —**BECCA JAMES** PG-13, 86 min. Now playing in wide release

### RR Compensation

Shot on the cheap in Evanston and Chicago, this 1999 drama by Zeinabu Irene Davis manages to surmount its budget limitations through the beauty and symmetry of its narrative. In the early 20th century a deaf black woman (Michelle A. Banks) struggles to overcome the three strikes against her, even as she falls for a hearing but illiterate stockyard worker (John Earl Jelks); interspersed with this tale, and starring the same actors, is a modern story about another deaf black woman and her hearing boyfriend. Davis shoots in black-and-white, using archival photos to establish the turn-of-the-century setting, but they're so evocatively deployed that you might forget they're a money-saving device. The storytelling is pointedly visual, modeled after the silent cinema, and the resulting purity of emotion elevates even the modern-day love story. —**J.R. JONES** 92 min. Thu 2/27, 7 PM. Block Museum of Art

### RR Daisies

My favorite Czech film, and surely one of the most exhilarating stylistic and psychedelic eruptions of the 60s, this madcap and aggressive feminist farce by Vera Chytilova explodes in any number of directions. Two uninhibited young women named Marie engage in escapades that add up to less a plot than to a string of outrageous set pieces, including several antiphallic gags and a free-for-all with fancy food (rivaling Laurel and Hardy) that got Chytilova in lots of trouble with the authorities; disturbing yet liberating, it shows what this talented director can do with freedom. A major influence on Jacques Rivette's *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, this 1966 feature is chock-full of female giggling, which might be interpreted in context as the laughter of Medusa: subversive, bracing, energizing, and rather challenging to most male spectators. In Czech with subtitles. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 74 min. Tue 3/3-Thu 3/5, 10:30 PM. Logan Theatre

### Fantasy Island

An interesting premise goes to waste in Blumhouse's horror reimagining of the 1977 television series, *Fantasy Island*. This adaptation keeps the bones of the original: strangers arrive at a mysterious island run by Mr. Roarke (Michael Peña) where they're told that their wildest fantasies will be brought to life, but as each fantasy begins, they quickly realize that some dreams

are better left unfulfilled. The problem with *Fantasy Island* is that it can't commit. It has scary moments, but they're not scary enough to be horror. It has jokes (most of which are told by two of the only interesting characters: Jimmy O. Yang as Brax Weaver/Tattoo and Ryan Hansen as J. D. Weaver), but it's not funny enough to be a comedy. There is magic, but we're led to believe this isn't magic even though the story makes no sense in reality. Even the fantasies of each character don't quite add up. The concept of wish fulfillment is a compelling one, but the film blows past an opportunity to explore that. By its end, *Fantasy Island* is just another cautionary tale against remakes. —**NOËLLE D. LILLEY** PG-13, 109 min. Now playing in wide release

### RR We Are Not Princesses

In most productions of Sophocles's *Antigone*, the tragedy is blunted by the distance of millennia. The bridge between the seats of a contemporary theater and the landscape where Antigone is murdered by a tyrannical king is thousands of years long. But the shimmering, fascinating, inherently dramatic documentary *We Are Not Princesses*, about Syrian refugee women rehearsing *Antigone*, closes that distance. Directors Bridgette Auger and Itab Azzamby take viewers through rehearsals unfolding within a Beirut refugee camp, using the play to explore the stark parallels between Sophocles's tragedy and the refugees' experiences. Antigone defied King Creon by burying her rebel brother, despite the king's order that he be left to rot in the streets. For the cast members, there's nothing distant or metaphorical about Antigone's predicament. "We don't know if their bodies have been eaten by dogs or what," says one woman of loved ones lost to the Syrian war, their bodies left to rot, unburied, where they fell. For another cast member, Antigone's imprisonment and erasure evokes memories of being married as a child and then imprisoned at home for losing her face veil. A third woman raps about fleeing Syria in high heels, weeping in pain as she ran. Gorgeous animation sequences (by Pedro Allevato) are used to protect the identities of cast members who could face brutal punishments if recognized on screen. The haunting images seem to capture the intersection between body and spirit as *Antigone* comes to life. We don't learn much about the organization leading rehearsals, which is fitting. *We Are Not Princesses* belongs to the women immersed in *Antigone*, and bears witness to their epic journeys. —**CATEY SULLIVAN** 74 min. Sat 2/29, 7 PM. Chicago Filmmakers

## ALSO PLAYING

### JCC Chicago Jewish Film Festival

The annual festival returns with more than 50 films featuring Jewish filmmakers, writers, and actors screening over three weekends in multiple venues including Logan Theatre, Century 12 Evanston/CineArts 6, Landmark Renaissance Place Cinema in Highland Park, and the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center. For all venues and full schedule of screenings visit [jccfilmfest.org](http://jccfilmfest.org). 2/28-3/15. Various venues

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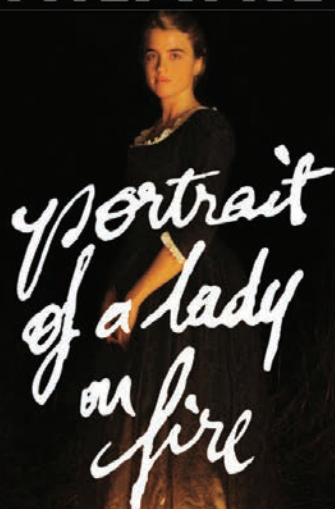
SAIC grad Shengze Zhu directed this documentary about the Internet livestreaming phenomenon in China, with a focus on more marginal individuals than those who have become celebrities. In Mandarin with subtitles. 124 min. Zhu attends the screening. Fri 2/28, 7 PM. Block Museum of Art

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chair, and second was that free shirt, which I promptly lost.

I still haven't made another trip to Metro, and even now I think about that concert. I probably wouldn't have attended without the free ticket (nothing against the artists—I just didn't know them well), and in retrospect I'm thankful I wasn't hugely into it. If I'd had even a marginally better time, I'd have risked it on the Metro steps again.

The Chicago live-music scene is a defining feature of the city's cultural landscape. It's a wide, diverse, and inclusive space, and over the decades it's been opened up to more and more voices and audiences—people who were once locked out of the social conversation surrounding music or even locked out of the business of making and performing it publicly. But while it's certainly good news that the willingness to accept diversity is no longer an overriding concern, the question remains: Is the scene inclusive of everyone? When it comes to accessibility for people with disabilities, the short answer is "It's complicated." The long answer is "It's *really* complicated."

When the Americans With Disabilities Act passed in 1990, people with disabilities were supposed to be granted an unprecedented level of access, not only to civil rights but also to public spaces and the social inclusion they offer. Language to this effect appears in every version of the act, from the 1990 original through the 2015 amendment, as well as in the disability section of the 2017 Chicago Human Rights Ordinance, which regulates accessibility in public spaces (more on that in a moment). This repetition is key, because it indicates that the legislators involved understood the importance of public spaces. Consider the other primary areas covered under ADA, such as employment, education, housing, and access to justice. Access to public spaces is on the same level—people with disabilities must be able to fully participate in culture and commerce in order to integrate themselves into modern life.

The ADA will turn 30 on July 26, 2020, and during its history tremendous strides have been made for those with disabilities—for an example, look no further than Tammy Duckworth's service in the Senate. At a micro level, the signs of progress are all around, in the ubiquity of basic access features such as curb cuts and braille signage. It's getting better every day, but as with all avenues of

# Music is for every body

Chicago's concert venues have made welcome advances in accessibility, but a regulatory gray area lets them fall short of what they should be.

By **BRIAN O'DONNELL**

**A**lmost ten years ago, I was offered a free ticket to see New Orleans rapper Curren\$y and Chicago duo the Cool Kids at Metro. I remember

two details from the show: the harrowing experience of having my wheelchair pushed up two flights of stairs to the theater, then lowered back down in a process that was somehow even more grueling and scary, and

the fact that Curren\$y gave me a T-shirt. I go to lots of concerts, but this one stands out—and not for good reasons. First was the venue, which I'd been assured would be fully equipped to handle a person in a wheel-



social progress, the more things improve, the more glaring the remaining failures become. Given that Chicago's live-music scene is so thoroughly enmeshed with the city's socio-cultural past, present, and future, it's as good a lens as any through which to examine the remaining gaps in access.

Section 600 of the 2017 Chicago Human Rights Ordinance is the most applicable legal standard for music venues—in its own words, its intent is to “implement the disability rights provisions.” Music venues are covered as public accommodations or commercial spaces and thus prohibited from discriminating against those with disabilities (section 600.202a). This includes but is not limited to providing physical access to venues, separate ticketing, accommodations for service animals, and, most relevant, the removal of barriers when necessary.

Among the accommodations covered are installing ramps, repositioning shelves, lowering buttons, and including braille translations (600.304). These modifications are

required if a covered structure was built after December 31, 2016 (600.401), and if a building predates the 2017 code, then any alterations after December 31, 2016, must accommodate access to the “maximum extent feasible” (600.402). This includes adding elevators to buildings taller than three stories or exceeding 1,000 square feet of usable space, excluding areas such as storage closets (600.404). The “maximum extent feasible” standard applies broadly, though, and there's also an overarching exception that lets businesses off the hook if accommodations would impose an outsize cost or other “undue burden.” To adjudicate claims, the city takes into account factors such as financial resources and total number of employees.

At this point, the complexity of the issue should be more clear. Yes, public spaces are required to make accommodations for people with disabilities, but the extent of such accommodations can be debated from all sorts of angles, and the diversity within the disability community makes access an ever-evolving

standard. So let's step outside the legal framework and look at the practical realities of engaging with the Chicago music scene. What's it like to actually go to shows with a disability—in my case, using a wheelchair?

I try to average a show a week, and that takes me all across the city and to all sizes and types of venues. If you do anything enough times, you start to pick up on patterns—and for me, those patterns mostly involve access. Why is this venue easier to go to than that one? How does the accessibility here affect how I need to plan my night? Why do acts I like keep playing Metro?

I've assessed a few prominent venues in terms of accessibility. I'll default to legal standards only when necessary—I prefer to simply try to tell you what a night at a show looks like for me. I can only speak to my specific experiences, of course, and how they relate to my specific condition—which means I'll be talking about mobility and wheelchair accessibility. People with other conditions may find some parallels, as may those without

disabilities who are simply affected in their own way by the physical realities of a venue.

## ARAGON BALLROOM

1106 W. LAWRENCE

The Aragon regularly plays host to touring acts just a step below those who can confidently book the United Center or Allstate Arena. It's a magnificent space, with a gorgeous interior facade, and the great musicians it attracts make it nearly unavoidable.

From an accessibility standpoint, the Aragon technically has everything, but it also has fundamental flaws that create complications. The accessible section is on the third-floor balcony, but the bathrooms (a crucial part of any night out!) are on the first floor. The elevator is a rickety old relic that barely fits a single wheelchair, so getting to and from the accessible section—which is spacious, with excellent sight lines—is an ordeal.

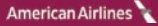
The Aragon, like every venue I discuss here, has fulfilled its legal obligations. But on a practical level, can access be considered

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| 3.8  | <b>WE BANJO 3</b>                                                        | 3.18-19 | <b>ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO</b> FEAT. DON ANTONIO & ALEX RUIZ         |
| 3.10 | <b>ANA POPOVIC</b>                                                       | 3.20-22 | <b>ERIC ROBERSON</b>                                            |
| 3.11 | <b>KASIM SULTON'S UTOPIA</b>                                             | 3.22    | <b>CHICAGO PHILHARMONIC BRUNCH</b> STRINGS, SYRAH, & SISTERHOOD |
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### UPCOMING SHOWS

|         |                                                                    |         |                                       |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------|
| 3.5+6   | <b>COWBOY JUNKIES</b>                                              | 3.31    | <b>AL JARDINE</b> (OF THE BEACH BOYS) |
| 3.14-16 | <b>SINEAD O'CONNOR</b>                                             | 4.1     | <b>THE DAVE HOLLIS BOOK TOUR</b>      |
| 3.24    | <b>TOM WEST</b>                                                    | 4.2     | <b>THE STEELDRIVERS</b>               |
| 3.25    | <b>BOBBY V</b>                                                     | 4.3-4   | <b>LYFE JENNINGS</b>                  |
| 3.26    | <b>DAVE SIMONETT</b> OF TRAMPLED BY TURTLES WITH ANDREA VON KAMPEN | 4.5-6   | <b>VANESSA CARLTON</b> WITH JENNY O.  |
| 3.27    | <b>MOMS &amp; MURDER</b> LIVE PODCAST                              | 4.7     | <b>SHAWN MULLINS</b>                  |
| 3.28    | <b>RODNEY CROWELL</b>                                              | 4.8     | <b>CAROLINE STANBURY</b>              |
| 3.29    | <b>CHICAGO SOUL SPECTACULAR</b>                                    | 4.9     | <b>THE JAMES HUNTER SIX</b>           |
| 3.30    | <b>VOICES OF CHICAGO: MUSICAL DIVERSITY IN THE WINDY CITY</b>      | 4.10-11 | <b>RAHEEM DEVAUGHN</b>                |
|         |                                                                    | 4.12-13 | <b>SHEILA E. AND THE E-TRAIN</b>      |
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## MUSIC

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equal when my experience is so much more complicated? This is a small issue, but it illuminates the gap between the goal of accessibility regulations and the real-world result.

**Is the scene inclusive of everyone? When it comes to accessibility for people with disabilities, the short answer is “It’s complicated.” The long answer is “It’s *really* complicated.”**

part-time venues, where you can find some of the most interesting underground or up-and-coming acts. Of course, house and basement shows are great for that sort of thing too, but most DIY venues are outside the scope of this discussion—private residences aren’t covered under the regulations outlined above. Galleries and similar converted spaces are still commercial businesses, though, and thus subject to the code.

While Co-Pro appears inaccessible, with two steps to enter, the staff have ramps for each landing that they’ll bring out. They’re not specialized pieces of equipment—you can get them at Lowe’s or on Amazon for less than \$200, and they’ll support nearly all wheelchairs. They’re basic, but they make all the difference.

The space also has gender-neutral restrooms that remove another major barrier for visitors with disabilities. Gender-neutral restrooms are, in my experience, a godsend for people like me, who have larger pieces of medical equipment or require assistance. They allow for assistants of a different gender to help without awkwardness, and they’re usually larger than gender-specific bathrooms, with more maneuvering room. It’s a perfect example of how working to include one group can open the door to others.

The vast majority of venues can be made accessible, at least for entrance, with simple changes. It comes down to whether or not the people running them care to think about how they can include everyone. The Co-Prosperity Sphere puts in that thought. Lots of other venues that I don’t have the space to address in detail also do a fine job, among them Thalia Hall, Martyrs’, the Vic, Sleeping Village (though there’s no access to the edge of the stage), Schubas, and Bottom Lounge.

### BEAT KITCHEN

2100 W. BELMONT

This throwback watering hole has surprisingly good food and a small venue in the back. The issue is with the bathrooms—they’re down a flight of steep stairs, and there’s no elevator. No getting around that.

### CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE

3219 S. MORGAN

This Bridgeport gallery, also the home base of Lumpen Radio and *Lumpen* magazine, hosts occasional concerts, including the annual Windy City Crash Pop Festival (in conjunction with Marz Brewing, another related enterprise). Co-Pro represents a class of hybrid or

### EMPTY BOTTLE

1035 N. WESTERN

I need to declare my bias before I proceed. I love the Empty Bottle in a way that I doubt I’ll ever love a human person. In an increasingly homogeneous landscape, the Bottle is a glorious throwback to the days of dives. Low ceilings, low lighting, surprisingly expansive bar offerings, an outstanding calendar of local and national acts—this is the purest expression of Chicago’s no-bullshit musical aesthetic. The result is often a tightly packed crowd imbued with breathless energy, thanks to a blast-it-to-the-back-wall sound system

## UPCOMING SHOWS

3/04 Cult of Luna w/Emma Ruth Rundle, Intronaut

3/05 We Came As Romans w/The Devil Wears Prada, Gideon, Dayseeker

3/06 Ally Brooke

3/12 ZZ Ward w/Patrick Droney

3/13 Gaelic Storm 3/14 Gaelic Storm

3/15 DragonForce w/Unleash The Archers, Visions of Atlantis

3/17 Mago de Oz / Liran Roll

3/18 Leslie Odom Jr.

3/19 Olivia O’Brien

3/20 Chippendales 3/21 Rod Tuffcurls & The Bench Press

3/22 Lil Mosey

3/26 Black Pumas w/Seratonas **SOLD OUT**

3/27 Fleshgod Apocalypse

3/28 Sepultura, Sacred Reich, Crowbar, Art Of Shock

3/29 Ivy Queen

3/31 Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real

4/3 Dennis DeYoung of STYX



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## MUSIC

that's right at the end of your nose.

The Bottle is older, though, and like many older places, it has small bathrooms that make it prohibitively difficult for wheelchair users to have any privacy. You've either got to block the door somehow or use the restroom more or less in the open. While the statute requires bathroom access, changes to make this particular bathroom more accessible would involve at the very least knocking out part of a stall wall, which would be burdensome. Bottle owner Bruce Finkelman says the club plans to improve the accessibility of its

women's room in 2020—possibly both restrooms, if its budget permits. He also stresses that the Bottle is eager to hear ideas from patrons about how it can be better about accessibility in other areas as well. The current situation at the Bottle, as with the location of the Aragon's restrooms, doesn't so much exclude disabled people as make things more complicated for them—it's one of the many challenges that remain in this twilight zone between regulation and reality.

I appreciate many things about the Bottle, but the standout feature is the staff. They



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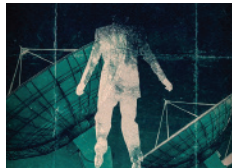
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continued from 27

should be commended for the casual and, dare I say, *normal* way they treat guests with disabilities. The staffs at some venues are unsure or uncomfortable when dealing with guests with disabilities, but the Bottle’s aren’t—and as a bonus, many of them are also in good bands.

No venue is without its flaws, but some have more than others. Though the House of Blues has helpful staff and is generally accessible, it doesn’t allow wheelchairs on the main floor, and its accessible section has poor sight lines. SPACE in Evanston likewise has terrible sight lines for wheelchair users, unless you manage to get a seat. The Chicago Theatre, though it’s gorgeous from the marquee on down, has a lousy accessible section that makes for a difficult experience in such a big space. And then there’s Metro.

METRO  
3730 N. CLARK

Metro has been in business about a decade longer than the ADA has existed, and the

building it occupies went up in 1927. But judging by its level of accessibility, it hasn’t had to change a thing since the law went into effect. To explain what going to a show there is like, it’s best to walk through it step by step.

The Wrigleyville landmark has a second-floor concert hall that hosts an excellent and eclectic array of nationally recognizable acts. But to access that hall, you’ll need to negotiate two long flights of stairs and a two-step landing at the top.

To its credit, the venue understands that this might be a problem. It asks disabled people to get in touch in advance of a show: “Metro is always happy to accommodate patrons with special needs,” says owner and founder Joe Shanahan. “We ask that patrons e-mail with their name, nature of your special need, and date of the show at ask@metro-chicago.com. Prior notice is preferable as it helps in preparation and to ensure we have staff ready to assist the patron in the enjoyment of the show.”

This request for prior notice implies there’s a solution in place for the room’s apparent

inaccessibility. The solution, unfortunately, is two ramps laid over those flights of stairs.

To clarify why this is a problem, I’ll do some math. The ADA has guidelines only for new ramps, which state that the maximum allowable slope is 1:12 (one inch of rise must have 12 inches of run), or about 4.8 degrees. Other organizations support this standard, though in my experience as a frequent ramp user, anything less than 15 degrees is fine. The average flight of stairs has an incline of 37 degrees. I haven’t measured the stairs at Metro, but even if they’re not as steep as they feel—even if they’re merely average—they’d still be well beyond the maximum slope allowed for a new ramp.

When you arrive to find these ramps, you’ll also find Metro’s entire security team waiting to push you up the stairs one grueling, nerve-racking inch at a time. This is inelegant and exhausting enough, but then they need to manually lift your chair up the final two steps. The trip down is every bit as harrowing, but you aren’t being pushed—on my wheelchair, I had to engage the motors by

tapping the joystick (which disengages the brakes) while staffers slowly guided the chair down the ramps, stopping on each landing to catch their breaths. Having the motors engaged allowed the chair to roll but didn’t let it roll freely—if it had, I would’ve been little more than lots of dead weight falling fast, and those steps leave very little margin for error. My chair weighs three times what I do, and I don’t have the muscular support to manage an accident as opposed to just being crushed. Thankfully, on the day I went, the staff were incredibly capable and good natured.

Why is this allowed to continue? At this point, you can probably rattle off a list of loopholes that might apply. In this case, installing an elevator would probably be deemed prohibitively expensive, if not infeasible due to the building’s layout. A smaller venue wouldn’t be large enough to trigger the elevator requirement, and a building on the National Register of Historic Places (just as a for instance) would have its own exemptions.

Perhaps the most effective barrier to improving access is, ironically, the bureaucracy



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04/22 - UNLADYLIKE

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## MUSIC

designed to protect and uphold access. Not everyone can afford to hire a lawyer and file a compliance claim, even though sometimes such a claim is the only way to push change. Chicago has a stellar reputation when it comes to accessibility and enforcement. But many aspects of accessibility can be defined as optional, depending on the circumstances (or whether you're dealing with someone who sees nothing but the basic necessities for survival as worthy of mandatory protection). In those cases, the intransigence of bureaucracy becomes more of an issue.

Why would I spend time and money to figure out why Metro is like this? Or to deal with a grievance procedure that will simply confirm that the venue is already in compliance? I can just not go there—or adopt the mindset, only half in jest, that I'll go strictly for shows that I'd be willing to die to see. I'm currently debating this for Drive-By Truckers, Dan Deacon, Pussy Riot, and AJJ. But as with so many other shows, they probably just won't be worth the risk or the effort.

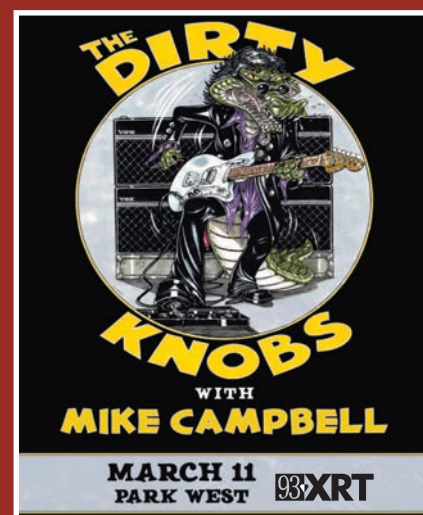
That's the real issue, isn't it? If a venue is accessible to the standard of the law but still excludes certain people under certain circumstances, then for those people the venue is inaccessible. They're kept out of the space, the experience, and the culture.

Also annoying is the fact that any time I spend discussing the nuances of regulation is time I can't spend discussing music. I'd much rather tell you about all the wonderful experiences I've had at shows or festivals, or talk about Thalia Hall's In the Round series, or really just address anything about the music. If I didn't love it so much, I wouldn't be here saying any of this.

It can feel confounding to try to solve the new access issues that have cropped up as old barriers were broken down, but I'm certainly not advocating defeatism—the first step is to see the issues. Take three seconds and ask yourself if a place is accessible for someone with a disability. Think about what that might entail, outside of “Are there steps?” (though don't ignore that question either). Progress requires collective effort. You may have a solution or an opportunity that I don't, or maybe you can see the situation in a different light. The ADA was put in place by a huge group of people working together, all contributing in any way they could, and it'll surely take the same sort of effort to fix the rest of these issues.

Then we can get back to the music. **■**

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Recommended and notable shows and critics' insights for the week of February 27

MUSIC

ALL AGES FREE

PICK OF THE WEEK

# Pioneering postpunks Wire continue to chart new territory on *Mind Hive*



GIULIANA COVELLA

WIRE

Wed 3/4, 8 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$30, \$25 in advance. 18+

IN 1987, British punk and postpunk pioneers Wire pulled an unforgettable power move: After a few years' hiatus, the band reconvened and announced a comeback tour. However, they were only interested in their new electronic material and refused to perform any of their beloved early songs. So they booked a Wire tribute band, the Ex-Lion Tamers (which included Chicago music critic Jim DeRogatis), to open for them and play their iconic 1977 album *Pink Flag* in its entirety. Decades down the line, they're not so reluctant to revisit their storied history. Wire's second act (or is it third?) has been under way since 2003, when they regrouped with original drummer Robert Grey (aka Robert Gotobed) following a ten-year break. The new *Mind Hive* (*Pink Flag*) is their eighth album since then (and their 17th full-length altogether), and it showcases much of what still makes the band unlike any other. Even when the arrangements are full and rich (as on the Krautrock-ish "Hung" and the droney, dreamy "Unrepentant"), their songs retain a distinctive chill austerity. The dystopian stomp of "Be Like Them" and the understated horror story in "Off the Beach" demonstrate that they haven't lost their dark edges either—there's an uneasiness lurking in every corner and in all 35 minutes. And this will continue to be a good year for Wire fans: not only is there a new album and tour, but the band are also collaborating with writer Graham Duff and director Malcolm Boyle on a forthcoming crowdsourced documentary, *People in a Film*, that spans Wire's entire career. Footage from the film—including the bandmates walking around a village, riding a tractor, and collaborating in the studio—can be seen in their video for "Cactused." On this tour, Wire will also show off their DJ skills; a different member will spin an opening set each night. —MONICA KENDRICK

# THURSDAY27

**CHARLES CURTIS** *Part of the Frequency Festival. 7 PM, Art Institute of Chicago, Fullerton Hall, 111 S. Michigan, \$5-\$10.*

Though her work is often characterized as minimalist, composer Éliane Radigue is a category unto herself. During the 1950s and '60s, the Paris resident worked as an assistant to the originators of *musique concrète*, Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry. But the music she composed after leaving their orbit employed long tones obtained from microphone feedback, tape loops, and synthesizers, and it's both quiet and demanding; close listening is necessary to perceive the subtle shifts in tonal color that occur as these pitches gradually coalesce and disperse. Just after the turn of the century, Radigue transitioned from playing electronics to composing for acoustic performers, and the first instrumentalist she chose was American cellist Charles Curtis. The essence of their first collaboration, *Naldjorlak I* (composed between 2005 and 2008), is the wolf tone, which occurs in stringed instruments when the resonant frequency of a bowed string and the resonant frequency of the instrument's body interact with each other to create a new sound—usually a raw maelstrom of string and wood noise. Cellists generally do whatever they can to avoid wolf tones, but on *Naldjorlak I*, Curtis sustains and modulates them for three quarters of an hour, obtaining rich layers of rasping and resonance that are every bit as entrancing as Radigue's electronics of yore. On Curtis's three-CD survey *Performances & Recordings 1998-2018*, just released by the Saltern label, he exercises similar devotion to the diverse requirements of a piece by 17th-century Scottish composer Tobias Hume, another by 20th-century 12-tone composer Anton Webern, a Velvet Underground-steeped original named "Music for Awhile," and a more recent Radigue composition. Curtis will return to *Naldjorlak I* for this Thursday concert, which is part of the Frequency Festival (booked by former *Reader* staffer Peter Margasak). The festival also presents performances of Radigue's music by violist Julia Eckhardt and trumpeter Nate Wooley on Wednesday, February 26, in the Bond Chapel of Rockefeller Memorial Chapel. Curtis will make a nonfestival appearance at the Art Institute that same day, playing over prerecorded drones in response to the work on display in the Alsdorf Galleries of Indian Art. —BILL MEYER

**CHICAGO FLAMENCO FESTIVAL** See also Friday and Saturday. Tonight's program features a performance by La Chimi as well as presentations and an art opening. 5:30-8 PM, Instituto Cervantes, 31 W. Ohio, \$100.

Few forms of music and dance embody raw emotion as exquisitely as flamenco. This formidable and quintessentially Spanish art form fuses elements from Jewish, Arab, and Roma cultures and distills the essence of grief, tragedy, fear, and joy into every note, gesture, and stomp. Hosted principally by the Instituto Cervantes, the first half of the 18th annual Chicago Flamenco Festival (part two is promised this fall) consists of ten performances, an art exhibit, workshops, and a wine tasting over the course of



## MUSIC



Ratboys  COURTESY THE ARTIST

a month. The carefully curated events focus on all three essential elements of flamenco: song (*cante*), dance (*baile*), and musicianship (*toque*). The bill includes artists from France and Spain as well as the U.S., among them local favorites Clinard Dance Flamenco Quartet, featuring Wendy Clinard as principal dancer, Steve Gibbons on violin, Marija Temo on vocals and guitars, and José Moreno on vocals. San Diego flamenco dancer La Chimi will perform with dancer, percussionist, and guitarist Oscar Valero and guitarist José Manuel Alconchel at the opening-night ceremony on Thursday, February 27, and then the next night with her ensemble, Luna Flamenca, at the festival's first full-length performance. Among the other artists are Jose del Tomate, a 21-year-old guitarist born into a long dynasty of acclaimed flamenco musicians, and dancer Niño de los Reyes, who has performed with international jazz and pop superstars Chick Corea and Paul Simon and recently became the first-ever dancer to win a Grammy; he contributed rapid-fire footwork and clapping to the 2019 Corea album *Antidote* (Concord). Rather than showcase the sort of glam-pop flamenco popularized by superstars such as Rosalía, the fest focuses on straight-to-the-jugular flamenco whose undiluted power may allow the audience to experience *duende*—the mystical force and passionate, enrapturing spirit of flamenco. In either case, these performances will undoubtedly heat up Chicago's winter nights.

—CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON

### FRIDAY28

**CHICAGO FLAMENCO FESTIVAL** See *Thursday*. Tonight's bill is *New Moon with Luna Flamenca* featuring La Chimi, José Manuel Alconchel, Briseyda Zárate, and Oscar Valero. 7 PM, Instituto Cervantes, 31 W. Ohio, \$50. 

**RATBOYS** See also *Saturday*. *Slow Mass and Advance Base* open. 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, sold out. 18+

Guitarist-vocalist Julia Steiner and guitarist David Sagan met as first-year students at the University of Notre Dame in 2010, and they've since become ingrained in Chicago underground rock. Under the name Ratboys, they made themselves a home in the emo scene in the mid-2010s, playing country-flecked indie songs and drawing in a couple prolific collaborators to fill out their live sets: drummer Marcus Nuccio of Pet Symmetry and Mountains for Cloudsand bassist Sean Neumann, who makes delightful indie pop as Jupiter Styles (he's also a *Reader* contributor). This rhythm section bolsters the Ratboys' third album, the new *Printer's Devil* (Topshelf), a soothing reflection on growing older and bittersweet farewells. Steiner and Sagan wrote it in Steiner's childhood home in Louisville, Kentucky, as her parents went through the process of selling the house. When she gently sings, "I just had a thought / 'What if I never came home?'" at the beginning of the taut, straightforward single "I Go Out at Night," you can feel the thrill and sadness in her voice as she processes her growing sense of dislocation. The sweet, wordless vocal harmony that rises up in the middle of "My Hands Grow" suggests that relief can be found in the homes we make for ourselves—and Steiner has thankfully fashioned her own anchor with her band. —LEOR GALIL

### SATURDAY29

**CHICAGO FLAMENCO FESTIVAL** See *Thursday*. Tonight's bill is *New Moon with Luna Flamenca* featuring La Chimi, José Manuel Alconchel, Briseyda Zárate, and Oscar Valero. 7 PM, Instituto Cervantes, 31 W. Ohio, 7 PM, \$30. 

**CUPCAKES** *The Life and Times, Atmospheric Audio Chair, and Spies Who Surf* open. 8 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$20, \$15 in advance. 18+

The alternative-rock boom of the 1990s resulted in lots of outre musicians landing major-label deals that would've been unthinkable in any decade before or

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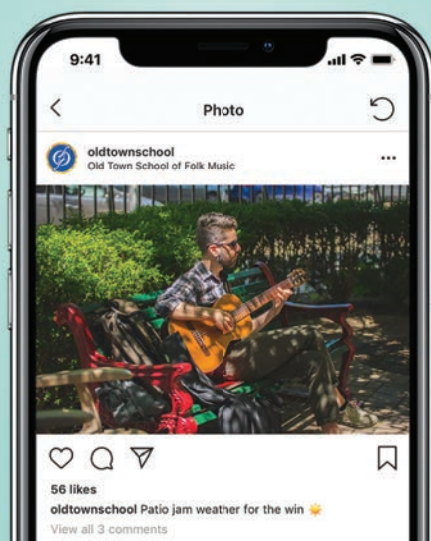
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## MUSIC

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Cupcakes NOEL WOODFORD

### continued from 31

since. Chicago four-piece Cupcakes, who emerged in 1996, both exemplify and transcend that era. On their sole album, 2000's *Cupcakes*, released on Dreamworks, they mold arena rock bombast, power-pop hooks, and dance ecstasy into freewheeling jams whose clean polish glistens even when the songwriting doesn't quite shine. Front man Preston Graves frequently busts out a show-stopping falsetto that kicks the songs into hyperdrive, a vocal feat that stood out in a time of postgrunge front men who were more likely to bellow than croon. But Cupcakes' idiosyncratic ingenuity comes out most strongly in their blend of rock and electronic music—every so often an arpeggiating guitar line that evokes a trance melody cuts through to accentuate the interstellar panache in Graves's lyrics. Cupcakes have been dormant for most of the past two decades, but they decided to celebrate the 20th anniversary of their only album with a reunion performance. Even if Graves can no longer hit the high notes on the semi-acoustic ballad "Cosmic Imbecile," this is a don't-miss show. —LEOR GALIL

**RATBOYS** See Friday. *Case Oats and Miranda Winters* open. 9 PM, Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, \$15. 21+

## SUNDAY1

**GANAVYA DORAISWAMY & RAJNA SWAMINATHAN** Part of the *Frequency Festival*. 2 PM, Chicago Cultural Center, Claudia Cassidy Theater, 78 E. Washington. FREE

The works of Ganavya Doraiswamy and Rajna Swaminathan offer a highly personal take on Carnatic music (South Indian classical music) that seamlessly blends ideas from different time periods and genres. On Doraiswamy's debut album, 2018's *Aikyam: Onnu* (Yāttirai), the vocalist and composer suffuses jazz standards such as George Gershwin's "Summertime" and Hoagy Carmichael's "Skylark" with a spirit all

her own, singing in a mix of English and Tamil, using styles beholden to the tradition of vocal jazz as well as to Carnatic music, and interweaving the material with Tamil anticolonial songs and Indian spirituals. The eloquence with which she merges these systems highlights her interest in addressing caste-based oppression and makes a provocative invitation for us to consider the commonalities between different cultures. On her 2019 album *Of Agency and Abstraction* (Biophilia), Swaminathan plays the *mridangam*, a traditional double-headed drum, with an ensemble that sometimes includes Doraiswamy, creating jazz pieces that draw from Carnatic music to bolster their restless tension and invigorating energy. At their duo performance at this year's Frequency Festival, Doraiswamy and Swaminathan will fluidly move between their own original compositions, devotional poems, Buddhist texts, and jazz standards. Their music tackles historical systems of oppression, and they aim to explore these social realities in a manner that provides opportunities for healing. Expect musically and thematically multifaceted works that open up a space for deep contemplation. —JOSHUA MINSOO KIM

**NEKTAR** 7 PM, Reggies' Rock Club, 2105 S. State, \$25. 17+

The history of improbably successful and long-lasting 70s prog band Nektar is a complicated one. The story starts in 1968, when four British lads—guitarist-singer Roye Albrighton, keyboardist-vocalist Allan Freeman, bassist-singer-Mellotron player Derek Moore, and drummer Ron Howden—met at the Star Club in Hamburg (where another group of British lads, the Beatles, famously cut their teeth). They'd been playing in different bands in Germany since 1965, and they bonded over their mutual love of the Fab Four and the new avant-garde directions rock music was taking. They formed Nektar in 1969, and by the following year they'd added fifth member Mick Brickett, who operated their heady light show and occasionally helped with lyrics and titles. Their first LP, 1971's *Journey to the Center of the Eye*, remains a fine example of the psychedelic



# SIGHT + SOUND

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## THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC

PIVOTAL CHICAGO MUSICIANS THAT SOMEHOW HAVE NOT GOTTEN THEIR JUST DUES by PLASTIC CRIMEWAVE



**WINTER BLUES**

**FRANK 'LITTLE SONNY' SCOTT JR.**

KNOWN AS THE SUPREME MAYOR OF MAXWELL STREET, BLUESMAN FRANK 'LITTLE SONNY' SCOTT JR. WAS BORN AARON WILLIS ON A PLANTATION IN MONTGOMERY, TEXAS, ON JUNE 21, 1927. AS A KID HE SOAKED UP COUNTRY MUSIC FROM THE RADIO, HIS GRANDMOTHERS SINGING IN CHURCH, AND SONGS HE HEARD WORKING IN THE FIELDS. AFTER A STINT IN THE NAVY DURING WWII, HE HEARD LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS IN HOUSTON, WHERE HE ALSO LEARNED BLUES AND GOSPEL FROM HIS UNCLE ELIJAH FAIR, A BLIND STREET MUSICIAN. SCOTT LEFT HOUSTON IN 1948, TRAVELING & SINGING SPIRITUALS WITH QUARTETS IN INDIANA & MISSOURI. HE CAME TO CHICAGO IN 1950, WHERE HE SANG AND PLAYED DRUMS ON MAXWELL STREET. HE STARTED A TRIO WITH FUTURE GUITAR GOD FREDDIE KING (THEN 15) AND SOON THE 2 OF THEM JOINED FELLOW MAXWELL JAMMER JIMMIE LEE ROBINSON IN THE EVERY HOUR BLUES BOYS. AFTER ROBINSON LEFT TO PLAY WITH ELMORE JAMES, SCOTT SWITCHED TO GUITAR AND FORMED A DIFFERENT TRIO THAT BECAME THE FIRST HOUSE BAND AT LEGENDARY

SOUTH-SIDE CLUB THERESA'S LOUNGE. IN THE EARLY 60S, UNABLE TO GET SIGNED IN CHICAGO, SCOTT RETURNED BRIEFLY TO HOUSTON, WHERE HE RECORDED WITH LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS AND RAN THE SHORT-LIVED LABEL GREAT SCOTT (WHICH WORKED WITH A YOUNG ALBERT COLLINS). SCOTT'S LHM RECORDED OUTPUT INCLUDES SONGS ON THE 1997 COMPILATION 'THE LOST AMERICAN BLUESMEN' & SOME GUITAR PLAYING ON JOHNNIE MAE DUNSON'S 2000 CD 'BIG BOSS LADY.' IN THE 90S SCOTT HELPED LEAD THE MAXWELL STREET HISTORIC PRESERVATION COALITION, TRYING TO PROTECT THE HISTORIC MARKET AND BLUES HUB FROM THE EXPANSION OF UIC. HE BUILT A COMMUNITY STAGE AT MAXWELL & HALSTED AND DECORATED IT WITH FLOWERS, PICTURES, & FOUND OBJECTS. HE ALSO MADE & SOLD COLLAGES AND INVENTED HIS OWN PERCUSSION INSTRUMENT BY HANGING HOUSE KEYS, JINGLE BELLS, AND OTHER NOISEMAKERS FROM TELEPHONE CORDS & RAHWIDE STRIPS. THE CITY TORE DOWN SCOTT'S MAXWELL ST. STAGE IN 2001, AND HE DIED ON MAY 24, 2017, AT THE HINE VA HOSPITAL WEST OF CHICAGO.

TUNE INTO THE RADIO VERSION OF 'THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC' ON 'OUTSIDE THE LOOP' ON WGN RADIO 720 AM, SATURDAY AT 6AM WITH HOST MIKE STEPHEN. [COMMENTS, IDEAS TO plasticcw@hotmail.com](mailto:plasticcw@hotmail.com)  
 ARCHIVED @ OUTSIDE THE LOOP RADIO.COM

concept album: its single epic song, which fills both sides of the album, is about an astronaut given vast knowledge by aliens (naturally) and verges on what many would call "experimental Krautrock" these days. The 1972 release *A Tab in the Ocean* furthered Nektar's cult appeal while streamlining their sound into more conventional psychedelic-progressive rock à la Pink Floyd and Yes. In the mid-70s, as Nektar became more melodic—even touching on funky rhythms—they found some commercial success while still exploring sci-fi themes. They broke into the top

20 on U.S. charts with 1973's *Remember the Future*, and the following year *Down to Earth* landed in the Top 40. The entire band moved to the States in 1976, but before and after releasing their slick 1978 major-label debut, *Magic Is the Child*, they underwent a series of lineup changes, and in the early 80s they called it quits. Now fast-forward to the year 2000, when Nektar reemerged with a new album, *The Prodigal Son*. The next year, the classic lineup headlined the popular prog festival NEARfest. After a zillion more personnel changes and tours with various



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| MARCH 6     | CHIDITAROD 11AM                    |
| MARCH 7     | OFF THE VINE 9PM                   |
| MARCH 8     | HEISENBERG UNCERTAINTY PLAYERS 7PM |
| MARCH 9     | RC BIG BAND 7PM                    |
| MARCH 10    | PROSPECT FOUR 9:30PM               |
| MARCH 11    | FLABBY HOFFMAN SHOW 8PM            |
| MARCH 12    | ELIZABETH'S CRAZY LITTLE THING     |
| MARCH 13    | FEATURING MICHELLE SHAFER 9PM      |
| MARCH 14    | FLABBY HOFFMAN SHOW 8PM            |
| MARCH 15    | KENNY'S 50TH BIRTHDAY BASH         |
| MARCH 16    | THE MAD POETS                      |
| MARCH 17    | TONY DO ROSARIO GROUP              |
| MARCH 18    | PROSPECT FOUR 9PM                  |
| MARCH 19    | MORSE & WAGNER WITH FRIENDS 8PM    |
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**ERIN EDMISTER & 3 TONS**  
*In The SideBar - Cannonball*

**SAT 29** **LEGACY GUILD FUNDRAISER**

*Big Band Sunday Nights / Open Mic Every Tuesday*

**TUE 3** **WDCB BLUESDAY TUESDAY**  
Hosted By WDCB's "BLUES TIME" w/Tom Marker  
On Site Grill Open 6-9 - \$5 Revolution Pints!  
7pm - 2 Sets - **L'IL ED & THE BLUES IMPERIALS**

**WED 4** **MARCH FORTH PARTY!**  
**FREE Open House! Celebrate New Beginnings!**  
**BLACKFOOT GYPSIES - EXPO '76**  
**BILL OVERTON'S KETTLE BROTHERS**  
Food By Big Star! Doors Open at 6

**THU 5** *Distant Brothers - 40 Foot Flames*  
*Deep Cricket Night*  
*In The SideBar -BITTERS*

**FRI 6** **YELLOWHAMMERS / SAILS**  
*In The SideBar - Jenny B & Friends*

**SAT 7** *International Women's Day Festival!*  
*Food Truck - Vendor Tent*  
**CATHY RICHARDSON'S GODDESSES OF ROCK**  
**KATIE TODD - SANDRA ANTONGIORGI - NAOMI ASHLEY**

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## MUSIC

### continued from 33

members, Albrighton died in 2016, but Moore and Howden (both based in New Jersey) and Brockett (in Pennsylvania) nonetheless vowed to celebrate the band's 50th anniversary. Last year they holed up and tackled some old demos as well as some new tunes for a new LP called *The Other Side*, which suffers slightly from overly tasty playing and production but still hints at their monumental past glories. On their current tour, Nektar are rumored to be revisiting sounds from their earliest LPs. With former Fire-ballet guitarist Ryche Chlanda back in the band (he joined briefly in 1978, as a 21-year-old wunderkind) and Brockett resuming his old-school live-light-show duties, this show promises to be once-in-a-lifetime heady space-prog trip, so climb aboard while you can. —**STEVE KRAKOW**

**SAAJTAK** *Cordoba and Not Lovely open.*  
8:30 PM, Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, \$8. 21+

The members of Detroit art-rock group Saajtak met at the University of Michigan in the early 2010s, when all four participated in an improvising ensemble called the Creative Arts Orchestra. They've since carried the experimental traditions they explored as students into their work in Saajtak and into their individual creative pursuits—each has developed such an impressive career that their CVs could fill a chapbook. Bassist Ben Willis composes music for dancers in a theater troupe called Nerve; percussionist Jon Taylor reframes ancestral Eastern European Jewish songs in new-music compositions as part of the ensemble Teiku; electronics maestro Simon Alexander-Adams has presented his multimedia art at Coachella; and vocalist Alex Koi has performed at the Toronto Jazz Festival. In Saajtak, they build off improvised sessions to create bristling, quasi-operatic recordings that feel primed to shift unexpectedly and travel down an entirely different path at any moment. They've made a point of documenting their creative possibilities and showcasing their open-minded attitude in the process; 2019's self-released *If You Ask* EP includes two original songs, three remixes, and an acoustic interpretation of the title track. On the original "If You Ask," Saajtak transform a minimal, undulating rhythm and an avian vocal harmony into a thunderous, dramatic rock symphony led by Koi's acrobatic powerhouse singing; it enlivens the song's most fragile moments with a feral energy that could power a fleet of lesser bands. —**LEOR GALIL**

## TUESDAY3

**REIGNING SOUND** *Skip Church opens.* 9 PM,  
*Sleeping Village, 3734 W. Belmont, \$20, \$18 in advance.* 21+

Memphis musicians enjoy a well-deserved reputation for having more going on beneath the surface than they initially let on. Alex Chilton, Tav Falco, and Jim Dickinson are known for putting a trashy stamp on roots music in their songwriting, but they also incorporate outside influences at unpredictable times. Such is also the case with the Reigning Sound, led by singer-guitarist Greg Cartwright—a founding member of the Oblivians, a trio that deconstructs

blues and punk until they sound nearly avant-garde. Though the Reigning Sound, which Cartwright launched in 2001, are far more earthbound, they also have many dimensions. Where the Oblivians use the blues as a touchstone, the Reigning Sound draw on Memphis's soul legacy, and much like the garage bands that came from the city in the 1960s (the Gentrys, the Box Tops), they can incorporate that influence without camping things up. On their most recent studio album, 2014's *Shattered*, Cartwright's vocals sound like Van Morrison circa 1967, after he left Them but before the jazzy textures of *Astral Weeks*. While soul is front and center, a folk-rock strain runs through a significant portion of the record—and remarkably, it never sinks into lazy introspection. Cartwright's message to the world sounds powerful even confined to a record, and he burns like a candle onstage. —**JAMES PORTER**

## WEDNESDAY4

**PSALM ZERO** *Kayo Dot headline; Psalm Zero, Anatomy of Habit, Blktxxth, and Dust Bath open.* 8 PM, Cobra Lounge, 235 N. Ashland, \$17, \$15 in advance. 17+

**Psalm Zero** have been playing a hybrid form of industrial metal informed by the noisier side of dark and electronic music since forming in New York in 2012. Originally the duo of multi-instrumentalist Charlie Looker (a classical composer and cofounder of experimental bands Extra Life and Zs) and guitarist Andrew Hock, the group showcased synth-heavy avant-rock compositions on their first two albums, 2014's *The Drain* and 2016's *Stranger to Violence* (both on Profound Lore). But shortly after the release of *Stranger to Violence*, Looker parted ways with Hock after a female musician accused Hock of inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature. That decision forced Looker to cancel several previously scheduled tour dates, but he retained the Psalm Zero name and continued to write material for the band while occasionally collaborating with friends. The band's new album, *Sparta* (on Looker's Last Things imprint), features bassist Ron Varod and drummer Keith Abrams, known for their work with New York avant-garde/progressive metal group **Kayo Dot** (who headline this tour in support of their own new full-length, *Blasphemy*). *Sparta* feels more clear-hearted and intentional than Psalm Zero's earlier records, perhaps as a result of Looker reassessing his approach after Hock's departure. Whatever the reason, *Sparta* is an evolution: though the band's roots in industrial metal and darkwave are still perceptible, a stronger sense of storytelling comes through on tracks such as "Return to Stone" (with guest vocals from Kristin Hayer, aka Lingua Ignota) and "Animal Outside." Looker's earnest-sounding singing on the latter recall Violator-era Dave Gahan, and make me wonder if this could've been an alternative-pop chart hit had it been released in 1990. It seems likely that Psalm Zero are just going to grow from here, so this show is a good chance to see them on their way up. —**SALEM COLLO-JULIN**

**WIRE** *See Pick of the Week, page 30. Wire DJs open.* 8 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$30, \$25 in advance. 18+ 





## GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

**FORMED IN 2017**, art-rock ensemble **Je'raf** arrange bits of hip-hop, jazz, funk, and postpunk into whimsical, progressive jams. All seven members (they're split between New York and Chicago) play in similarly animated, eccentric bands outside the group too—bassist and vocalist **PT Bell** is in art-punk unit **Blacker Face**, for instance, and vocalist **Brianna Tong** fronts jazz-fusion group **Cordoba**. On Saturday, February 29, local labels **Amalgam** and **No Index** release Je'raf's rambunctious and politically charged debut album, **Throw Neck**. That night they celebrate with a headlining set at **Hungry Brain**; **Udababy** opens, and tickets are \$10.

Morrissey's swerve into reprehensible political gibberish, mediocre albums, and lackluster live shows over the past 20 years has left many sweet and tender hooligans reaching for their Smiths albums far less often than they used to. Local electronic musician **Nicky Flowers** has a solution: a covers project called the **Smynth**s, which recently dropped the charming EP **The Smynth's Return**. It seems bound to offend the famously synth-averse Mozzers: Flowers turbocharges Johnny Marr's melodies with a raft of ringing keyboards and glorious vocoder-assisted crooning. Giving offense is the point—the Smynth's are "dedicated to psychically destroying Morrissey," Flowers says. "Johnny Marr was the Smiths, 100 percent." Shots fired! Due to prohibitive licensing costs, the Smynth's aren't on any streaming services, but the EP (and a 2018 self-titled full-length) are available via Flowers's Bandcamp.

**Justin Samuel Martin** (of indie-rock group **Automata**) makes stylistically loose indie-pop as **Otherly**, with occasional help from his friends—Automata front woman **Rachel Sarah Thomas**, for example, adds luscious vocals to recent singles "Nadia" and "Leave." Both those tracks appear on Otherly's debut album, **Darkling**, which drops Friday, February 28. Otherly plays a free release party that night at the **Whistler**. —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip\_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

WOLF BY KEITH HERZIK

CHICAGO SHOWS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IN THE WEEKS TO COME

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## NEW

**Oleta Adams** 6/12, 8 PM, City Winery **ALL**  
**Adult, Body of Light** 6/12, 9 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 2/28, 10 AM  
**AJR, Quinn XCII, Ashe** 8/8, 6 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion **ALL**  
**Alleys & Gangways, Dead Rest, Turn N Fire, Hi Water** 3/13, 8:30 PM, GMan Tavern  
**American Music Festival** 7/2-7/5, FitzGerald's, Berwyn  
**Audrey Mika, Souly Had** 3/10, 7:30 PM, Schubas **ALL**  
**Tab Benoit** 6/7, 8 PM, City Winery **ALL**  
**Best Coast, Mannequin Pussy** 3/10, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **ALL**  
**Bobby V** 3/25, 8 PM, City Winery **ALL**  
**Bowling for Soup** 4/19, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+  
**Budos Band** 4/17, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+  
**Candlemass, the Skull, Bloodiest** 4/20, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+  
**Vanessa Carlton, Jenny O.** 4/5-4/6, 8 PM, City Winery **ALL**  
**Case Oats, Tucker Rigglesman & the Cheap Dates, Bloodshot DJs, Rookie** 3/6, 8 PM, GMan Tavern  
**Chicago Honky Tonk presents A Saturday Special featuring Grey Garing & the Cowpokes, Lawrence Peters Outfit, Casey James Prestwood & the Burning Angels, Andrew Sa & Kelly Hogan, and more** 3/28, 4:45 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn  
**Chicano Batman, Le Butcherettes** 5/9, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 2/28, 10 AM, 18+  
**Brandy Clark, Kelsey Waldon** 5/8, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **ALL**

**Luke Combs, Ashley McBryde, Ray Fulcher** 11/5, 7 PM, United Center, on sale Fri 2/28, noon **ALL**  
**Cosmic Country Showcase featuring Lavender Country** 4/11, 9:30 PM, Hideout, on sale Fri 2/28, noon  
**Daphne 2020: 35/25 featuring Lady D & Psycho-Bitch** 3/14, 10 PM, Smart Bar  
**Daphne 2020: Defected USA with Sam Divine, Monki, Deepsmith** 3/20, 10 PM, Smart Bar  
**Daphne 2020: Lake Effect with DJ Heather and more** 3/13, 10 PM, Smart Bar  
**Daphne 2020: Niki Kitz, Miss Scarlett, Delilac, Phox** 3/19, 10 PM, Smart Bar **FREE**  
**Daphne 2020: Research & Development featuring Flower Food, Erika Gluck (live), Kona FM & Trouble Helix** 3/12, 10 PM, Smart Bar **FREE**  
**EOB** 5/27, 7:30 PM, Metro, on sale Fri 2/28, 10 AM, 18+  
**Etana & Raw-Soul Rebels, Yana Liya** 6/20, 9 PM, Wild Hare  
**Ethers, Fran, Watery Follies** 3/30, 9:30 PM, Sleeping Village  
**Fab Faux** 5/30, 8 PM, Park West **ALL**  
**Flamenco from Extremadura: Vía de la Plata featuring Celia Romero/Andrés Barrios Navarro/Fuensanta Blanco/Sergio García** 11/6-11/7, 7 PM, Instituto Cervantes **ALL**  
**Flamenco from Extremadura featuring Esther Merino with Fuensanta Blanco/Manual Valencia/Sergio García** 11/13-11/14, 7 PM, Instituto Cervantes **ALL**  
**Ivy Ford** 3/18, 8 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn  
**Free Nationals** 3/8, 9 PM, Chop Shop, 18+  
**John Fullbright Band** 6/22, 8:30

PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, on sale Fri 2/28, 11 AM  
**Ezra Furman** 5/30, 9:30 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 2/28, 10 AM  
**Gashi** 3/13, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+  
**Gizzelle, Monica Rocha & Cota** 3/13, 7 PM, National Museum of Mexican Art **FREE** **ALL**  
**Habibi, Cam's Jams** 3/13, 9:30 PM, Hideout  
**Halestorm** 7/13, 7:30 PM, Rialto Square Theatre, Joliet **ALL**  
**Holy Wave, Les Tropic** 3/13, 8:30 PM, Beat Kitchen  
**lonnalee, lamamiwhoami, Tungorna** 5/7, 9 PM, Metro, 18+  
**Irreversible Entanglements, Isaiah Collier & Jeremiah Collier: Gemini** 3/31, 7:30 PM, Co-Prosperity Sphere, 17+  
**JoJo** 5/27, 7:30 PM, the Vic **ALL**  
**Judas Priest** 9/26, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont **ALL**  
**King Buzzo featuring Trevor Dunn** 6/20, 10 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 2/28, 10 AM  
**Korn, Faith No More, Helmet, '68** 9/15, 6 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park **ALL**  
**Lanzón** 3/7, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+  
**Nick Lowe's Quality Rock & Roll Revue, Los Straitjackets** 6/13, 8 PM, Park West, on sale Fri 2/28, 10 AM, 18+  
**Magnetic Fields** 6/1-6/4, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 2/28, noon **ALL**  
**Laura Marling** 4/16-4/17, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **ALL**  
**Midwest Action showcase featuring Bev Rage & the Drinks, Impulsive Hearts, Harvey Fox, Richard Album (solo)** 3/19, 8:30 PM, Sleeping Village  
**Mirrored featuring Matthew Rikken, Will Barnard, River**

**Adomeit, Tommy Carroll** 3/28, 5:30 PM, Empty Bottle **FREE**  
**Juana Molina** 4/30, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **ALL**  
**Music Band** 4/9, 9:15 PM, Empty Bottle  
**Ode, Antony & the Tramps, Glad Rags** 3/7, 9 PM, Sleeping Village  
**Omayra Amaya Dance Company featuring Roberto Castellón & YiYi Orozco** 3/13-3/14, 7 PM, Instituto Cervantes **ALL**  
**Ono 40th Anniversary show with Moor Mother, Buck Gooter** 5/1, 9 PM, Empty Bottle  
**Anders Osborne** 5/14, 6:30 and 9:30 PM, City Winery **ALL**  
**Jeff Parker & the New Breed** 3/8-3/9, 8 and 11 PM, Dorian's, both 8 PM shows are sold out  
**Brent Penny, 100% Cement, Forced into Femininity, Stressica** 3/16, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle **FREE**  
**Steve Poltz** 4/8, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **ALL**  
**Pontac, Lawrence Peters Outfit, Friends of the Bog** 3/19, 9:30 PM, Hideout  
**Post Animal, Twen, Woongi** 4/23, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+  
**Primus, Wolfmother, Battles** 7/10, 7 PM, Chicago Theatre **ALL**  
**Cal Scruby** 3/13, 6:30 PM, Subterranean, 17+  
**Carolyn Sills Combo** 4/12, 6 PM, SPACE, Evanston **ALL**  
**Terrance Simien & the Zydeco Experience** 3/21, 9 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn  
**Bria Skonberg** 4/10, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston **ALL**  
**Dave Specter** 3/16, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **ALL**  
**Sugarplump, Safari Room, Ava Lake** 3/22, 9 PM, Sleeping Village  
**TC Superstar, Uma Bloo, Nordista Freeze, Nick DeLaurentis** 4/23, 9 PM, Sleeping Village  
**Tossers, Avondale Ramblers, Siderunners** 3/14, 8 PM, Reggies' Rock Club, 17+  
**Tú Tocas Tú Cantas Yo Bailo featuring Manuel Gutiérrez, José Cortés & Andrés Vadin** 3/20-3/21, 7 PM, Instituto Cervantes **ALL**  
**Vundabar, Boycott, Ophelias** 3/21, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+  
**The Weeknd, Sabrina Claudio, Don Toliver** 6/24, 7 PM, United Center, on sale Fri 2/28, 11 AM **ALL**  
**Winona Forever, Modern Vices, Late Nite Laundry** 4/8, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+  
**Joe Wong & Nite Creatures** 5/30, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 2/28, 11 AM, 18+  
**Donovan Woods & the Opposition, Emily Brimlow** 5/10, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **ALL**  
**Yomí, Jake Sherman, Yadda**

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Yadda 3/29, 9 PM, Sleeping Village

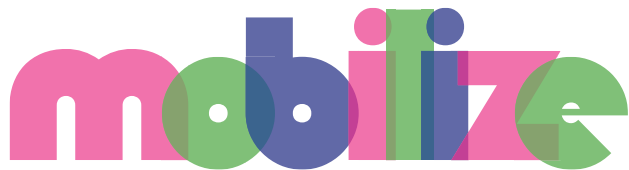
## UPDATED

**Above & Beyond** 6/5, 8 PM; 6/6, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, 6/6 show added **ALL**  
**Pop Smoke** 3/21, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, canceled; contact point of purchase for refund information, 17+

## UPCOMING

**Acacia Strain, Rotting Out, Creeping Death, Chamber, Fuming Mouth** 3/25, 7 PM, Subterranean, 17+  
**Alaké Wubé & Girma Bàyèné** 3/18, 7 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **FREE** **ALL**  
**Blunts & Blondes, SubDocta, Bawldy** 3/14, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+  
**Bongzilla, Something is Waiting, Plague of Carcosa, Psychic Nurse** 3/12, 8 PM, Reggies' Music Joint  
**Jaimie Branch's Fly or Die** 3/15, 9:30 PM, Hideout  
**Cactus featuring Carmine Appice** 3/14, 7 PM, Reggies' Music Joint  
**Gordon Lightfoot** 3/29, 8 PM, Copernicus Center **ALL**  
**Lil Wayne** 3/28, 9 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+  
**Little People, Frameworks, Yppah** 3/20, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+  
**Lucki** 3/15, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge **ALL**  
**Lucky Chops** 3/6, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+  
**Mãgo de Oz, Liran' Roll** 3/17, 8 PM, House of Blues, 17+  
**Anna Meredith** 3/15, 8:30 PM, Co-Prosperity Sphere, 18+  
**Michigan Rattlers** 3/12, 8 PM, Martyrs'  
**Frank Orrall** 3/14, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **ALL**  
**Petrol Girls, Typesetter** 3/23, 9:30 PM, Sleeping Village  
**Gregory Porter, Ledisi** 3/27, 7 PM, Chicago Theatre **ALL**  
**Pro-Pain** 3/29, 7:30 PM, the Forge, Joliet **ALL**  
**Pussy Riot, Deli Girls** 3/26, 7 PM, Metro **ALL**  
**Queers, Dollyrots, Handguns, Capgun Heroes** 3/20, 7 PM, Reggies' Music Joint  
**Radio Hate, Cherokee Astro, Smart Shoppers** 3/6, 9 PM, Liar's Club **ALL**





A series of political engagement events as curated by  **Persist List**  
Keep the momentum

**Illinois Supreme Court Justice Forum**  
**February 27**  
**6pm - 8pm**  
Grace Lutheran Church  
1430 S. Blvd.  
Evanston, IL

**Policy Solutions to Lower Rx Drug Costs**  
**February 27**  
**7pm**  
Immanuel Hall  
302 Grant St.  
Hinsdale, IL

**Indivisible Evanston Book Club: "Don't Think of an Elephant!"**  
**March 3**  
**7pm-9pm**  
Page 1 Books  
(Central Street Business District)  
1808 Central St.  
Evanston, IL

**Super Tuesday Watch Party**  
**March 3**  
**1:30pm - 3:30pm**  
Emmett's Palatine  
110 N. Brockway St.  
Palatine, IL

**Training Class for Canvassing Newbies**  
**March 3**  
**5:30pm - 7:30pm**  
Hideout Inn  
1354 W. Wabansia Ave.

**Clean Energy Lobby Day 2020**  
**March 4**  
**10am - 2pm**  
Illinois State Capital Building  
301 S. 2nd St.  
Springfield, IL

**Brewery Tasting with Indivisible IL9**  
**March 4**  
**7pm - 9pm**  
My Buddy's  
4416 North Clark St.

**March Hyde Park Rent Control Action**  
**March 6**  
**2pm - 4pm**  
Nichols Park  
1355 E. 53rd St.

**African American Women & The Vote: A Centennial Review**  
**March 6**  
**5:30pm - 8pm**  
Chicago Public Library  
400 S. State St.

**The Personal is Political: Storytelling & Reproductive Justice**  
**March 7**  
**1pm - 4pm**  
Location TBA

**Recognition Delayed: The Contributions of African American Suffragists and Why Their Stories Matter**  
**March 8**  
**1pm - 3:30pm**  
UIC Richard J. Daley Library  
801 S. Morgan St.  
1st Floor Conference Room

**2020 Candidate Night**  
**March 9**  
**7pm - 9pm**  
Zoe's Patio  
5518 S. Archer Ave.

**ACLU Lunch 2020**  
**March 27**  
**11am - 1:30pm**  
Hilton Chicago  
720 S. Michigan Ave.

For more information of listed events please visit [persistlist.org](https://persistlist.org)

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READER

## OPINION



### SAVAGE LOVE

## Outsource the sloppy and spitty stuff he likes

Plus, a man who misses when the only beards dudes had were metaphorical

By **DAN SAVAGE**

**Q:** I'm a 31-year-old cis bisexual woman. I'm hetero-romantic and in a monogamish relationship with a man. We play with other people together. I've never liked giving blowjobs because I was taught that girls who give blowjobs are "sluts." Phrases that are meant to be insulting like "You suck," "Suck it," "Go suck a dick," etc. created a strong association in my mind between blowjobs and men degrading women. (Men take what they want, and women get used and called sluts.) As such, I never sucked much dick—and if I did, it was only briefly and never to completion. I also find spit and come kind of gross. Even when I get really wet during sex, it's a bit of a turnoff, and I hate that it makes me feel gross and wish I could change my thinking around it. Early in our relationship, my husband noticed the lack of blowjobs and confronted me, saying they were really important to him. At first I felt a

little insecure about being inadequate in this area, but then I decided to do some research, because I honestly thought it wasn't just me and most women don't like giving blowjobs. (Because how could they? It's so demeaning!) But I learned lots of my female friends enjoy giving blowjobs—they like being in control, giving a partner pleasure, etc.—so I googled ways to start liking blowjobs and I've started to get into them! It's great! Except I still don't like when he comes in my mouth or if a blowjob gets super spitty. But my husband loves sloppy blowjobs; he says the lubrication feels good and he enjoys the "dirtiness" of it. If I know he's getting close to coming or if it gets super wet and I have spit all over my face, my gag reflex activates and it's hard to continue. I feel like I'm at an impasse. I want to give him the blowjobs he wants, but I don't know how to get around (or hopefully start enjoying!) the super-sloppy-

through-to-completion blowjobs he likes. Do you have any advice? —**SLOPPY ORAL ALWAYS KEEPS ERECTIONS DRENCHED**

**A:** You play with other people together, SOAKED, but have you tried observing—by which I mean actively observing, by which I mean actually participating—while your husband gets a sloppy blowjob from someone who really enjoys giving them? If someone else was blowing your husband while you made out with him or sat on his face or played with his tits or whatever might enhance the experience for him . . . and you watched another woman choke that dick down . . . you might come to appreciate what's in it for the person giving the sloppy blowjob.

Most people who were taught that girls who give blowjobs are sluts were also taught that open relationships are wrong and women who have sex with other women are going to



# OPINION

by JAKOB OWENS / UNSPLASH

hell. You got over what you were taught about monogamish relationships and being bisexual years ago, SOAKED, and recently got over what you were taught about women who enjoy sucking cock. While some people have physical limitations they can't overcome—some gag reflexes are unconquerable—watching someone enjoy something you don't can make you want to experience it yourself.

But even if your observations don't trigger a desire to get down there and get sloppy and swallow his load yourself, your husband would be getting the kind of blowjobs he enjoys most and you would be an intrinsic part of them. If you set up the date, you'd be making them happen, even if you weren't doing them. And if you were into the scenario and/or the other woman—if the whole thing got you off, not just off the hook—then there would be something in it for you, too.

And take it from me, SOAKED, to be kissed with both passion and gratitude by, say, a husband (ahem) who's really enjoying something someone else is doing for/to him—whether or not that something is something you also enjoy doing for/to him from time to time—is really fucking hot. So even if you never come around—even if sloppy blowjobs are something you have to outsource permanently—you and your husband can enjoy years of sloppy blowjobs together, with the assistance of a series of very special (and very slutty) guest stars. And you can always get those blowjobs started—the non-sloppy, non-spitty initial phase—before passing the baton off to your guest star.

**Q:** Married 40-year-old gay guy here. I hate beards—the look, the feel, the

smell—and I miss the good old days when the only beards gay dudes had were metaphorical. When I got back from a long business trip, my hot, sexy, previously smooth husband of many years was sporting a beard. Unsurprisingly, I hate it and find it to be a complete turnoff. However, he says this is controlling behavior on my part, it's his body and his choice, and he's hurt that I'm rejecting him. He also says I'll get used to it and he doesn't plan to keep it forever. I agree that it's his body and his choice, but I think he should still take me into consideration, and that it's actually him who's rejecting me, by choosing the beard over me. What's your take? —**SPOUSE'S HAIRINESS AVERTS VIRILE ERECTION**

**A:** I'm with you, SHAVE, but I'm also with him. It is his body, and growing a beard is something he can choose to do with the face section of his body. But that my body/my choice stuff cuts both ways: Your body is yours, and what you do with your body is your choice. And you can choose not to press your body against his—or press your face against his—while he's got a beard. If long business trips are a regular part of your life, maybe he could grow his beard out in your absence and shave when you get home. (Full disclosure: I have a pronounced anti-beard bias, which means I'm not exactly impartial.)

**Q:** I'm a 30-year-old queer cis woman and a late bloomer. My first relationship—with a hetero cis man—began when I was 28. He was my first sexual partner. I fell in love hard, but he broke up with me after almost two years. Months later, I know I'm not ready to fall in love again, but I have a high sex drive.

I masturbate frequently, but when I think about playful/romantic sex, the only memories I have are with the ex, which makes me sad. So I watch rough porn, which keeps me from thinking about the ex. But watching bondage videos alone isn't the sex life I want. Should I Tinder or Lex up some rough casual sex? Get drunk and get some more memories in the mix? (I don't think I could get out of my head enough to do this sober.) Assuming I minimize the risks of pregnancy and STIs and partners that are bad at consent, what's the risk of going for it? How does it compare to the risk of getting stuck in this nowhere land and never finding a new love/sex buddy? Or maybe I need to get drunk and jerk off alone without the porn and just feel all my feelings and avoid any risk of crying on some poor stranger? —**I NEED A PLAN TODAY**

**A:** Do it all, INAPT. Masturbate to kink porn and feel dirty, masturbate to your memories and feel sad, and put yourself out there on Tinder and Lex and see if there isn't someone who intrigues you. But stop telling yourself you can't find romance with a partner you first met up with for rough sex. I know lots of people who first met up with someone for rough sex, clicked on a deeper level, started dating, and have since enjoyed years of sex that's both rough and loving. Finally, booze has a way of intensifying feelings of sadness—so if you don't want to wind up sobbing on the shoulder of some poor stranger, don't get drunk before that hookup. **✂**

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Akuna Capital LLC has the following Open Positions in Chicago IL: 1. Sr. Developer, C++/Python/FPGA. Must have BS in Comp Sci, Engineering, Math or related field & 5 yrs exp as Developer or related role that included C++, Python and FPGA. Will also accept coursework in stated fields in lieu of 1 yr experience. Must pass coding exam. Multiple

positions. 2. C++ Gateway Developer, Mid-Level Must have BS in Comp Sci, Eng or related & 5 yrs exp as Software Developer in C++ and Python. In lieu of BS & 5 yrs exp will accept MS in stated fields & exp as Software Developer. Intern or coursework in software development that used C or C++ and Python languages. Coursework must have included operating systems, algorithms, data structure, and computer networks. Must pass coding exam. Multiple positions. 3. Mid-Level C++ Developer, Automation Must have BS in Computer Science, Eng or related field & 5 yrs exp as Developer, Engineer, or related role that included developing applications in C++. In lieu of BS & 5 years exp, will accept MS and coursework in C++. Must pass coding exam. Multiple positions.

Direct resumes to: Megan Suerth, Akuna Capital LLC 333 S Wabash, Suite 2600, Chicago, IL 60604. If hired, must provide document confirming authorization to work legally and permanently in the U.S. Employment is at its offices in Chicago at 333 S Wabash Ave.

Network Engineer - Schaumburg, IL Seeking MS in Electrical Engg., Comp. Engg., or closely related field. Mail CV to: Attn: HR/Job #0211, D&D Internetworking, Inc., 2385 Hammond Dr. #8, Schaumburg IL 60173.

iManage LLC seeks in Chicago, IL: Senior Support Engineer with Bachelor's or for equi in Comp Sci or Info Tech and Mgmt, plus 18 months of exp in the job offered or sub sim pos. Send resume to Peopleops@imanager.com (ref. no. L9768) or iManage LLC, Attn: Recruiting, 540 West Madison St., Ste. 300, Chicago, IL 60661.

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TransUnion, LLC seeks Sr. Developers for Chicago, IL location to develop sw applications. Master's in Comp Sci/Eng/any Eng field + 5 yrs exp. req'd. Req'd skills: Ab Initio (GDE), Metadata Hub, PlanIT, Teradata, Ab Initio Continuous Flows, Toad Control Center, Ab Initio Data profiler, Oracle, DB2, Unix/Linux, Shell scripting, Agile Autosys, Express-IT (BRI & ACE development). Send resume to: R. Harvey, REF: SKT, 555 W Adams, Chicago, IL 60661

TransUnion, LLC seeks Solution Architects for various & unanticipated workites throughout the U.S. (HQ: Chicago, IL) to develop, analyze, & maintain tools that support & automate processes for sw product releases & configuration. Master's in Comp. Sci./Comp. Eng. + 5 yrs exp. req'd. Req'd skills: must incl. 1yr w/ Java/J2EE; product release & configuration; IT occupation; Oracle; Unix/Linux; Perl Scripting; Docker; Kubernetes; CI/CD; AWS; Telecommuting permitted. Send resume to: R. Harvey, REF: VKN, 555 W. Adams, Chicago, IL 60661.

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ThoughtWorks Inc. seeks Senior Consultant/Developer to work in Chicago, IL & various unanticipated U.S. locations to work on large-scale, custom-designed, enterprise-level software development projects that use object-oriented technologies, such as Java or Ruby. Must have Bachelor's degree in Computer Science, Computer Engineering, Information Systems, Engineering or related field. The applicant must have 3 yrs exp. in job offered, Consultant, Developer, or related IT occupation. Must have 12 mo. exp. in: (1) Analyzing, developing, designing, and testing object-oriented and full life-cycle software development projects using Java, Ruby, JavaScript, JUnit, Spring, MySQL, Oracle, and Selenium; (2) Utilizing Agile development methodologies including Continuous Integration, Extreme Programming, Test-Driven Development and pair programming; (3) Performing automation test frameworks, including unit, functional, and integration testing; (4) Developing software applications using Java or Ruby; (5) Working on projects with distributed teams, including coordinating across countries and time zones; and (6) Coaching and mentoring junior developers in all aspects of software development, including Agile development methodologies. Willingness to travel at least 80% across US. Send resume to jobs@thoughtworks.com w/ Job ID OF-SCD2020.

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Notice is hereby given, pursuant to "An Act in relation to the use of an Assumed Business Name in the conduct or transaction of Business in the State" as amended, that a certification was registered by the undersigned with the

Country Clerk of Cook County. Registration Number: Y20003262 on February 24, 2020. Under the Assumed Business Name of BRIFIO, With the business located at: 4105 N Sheridan RD APT 1s, Chicago, IL 60613.

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to "An Act in relation to the use of an Assumed Business Name in the conduct or

transaction of Business in the State," as amended, that a certification was registered by the undersigned with the County Clerk of Cook County. Registration Number: Y20003121 on February 4, 2020 Under the Assumed Business Name of Salon V. Rose with the business located at 6309 W. Diversey Ave., Chicago, IL, 60639 The true and real full name(s)

and residence address of the owner(s)/partner(s) is: Susan Narvaez, 3404 W. Shakespeare, Chicago, IL, 60647

STATE OF ILLINOIS, PUBLICATION NOTICE OF COURT DATE FOR REQUEST FOR NAME CHANGE. Location Cook County - County Division - Case Type: Name Change from JULIO RANGEL RIVERA JR to DeLuca

Ethan Amasiano Court Date April 13, 2020, 9:30 AM in Courtroom #1706 Case # 2020CONC000222

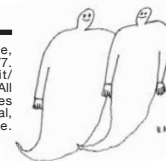
County. Registration Number: Y20003125 on February 4, 2020 Under the Assumed Business Name of DIVINELY ORDERED LIFE CELEBRATIONS with the business located at 3255 W. PALMER STREET UNIT 2, CHICAGO, IL 60647 The true and real full name(s) and residence address of the owner(s)/partner(s) is: CYNTHIA-VAL CHAPMAN 3265 W. PALMER STREET UNIT 2, CHICAGO, IL

60647, USA State of Illinois, Publication Notice of Court Date for Request for Name Change, Location Cook County - County Division - Case Type: Name Change from Alberto Alonso Blasquez to Alberto Alonso, Court Date April 13, 2020, 9:30 AM in Courtroom #1706 Case # 2020CONC000200

OF COURT DATE FOR REQUEST FOR NAME CHANGE. Location Cook County - County Division - Case Type: Name Change from Alberto Alonso Blasquez to Alberto Alonso, Court Date April 13, 2020, 9:30 AM in Courtroom #1706 Case # 2020CONC000200

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